

THE FORTUNES OF THE TEAM

RALPH H. BARBOUR

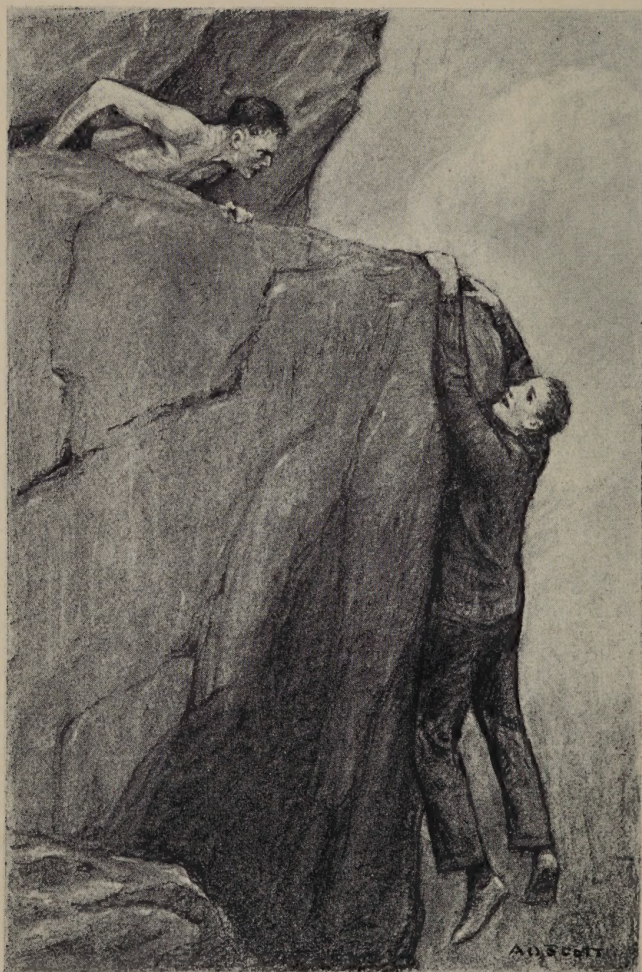
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THE FORTUNES OF THE TEAM



'IT'S NOT WORTH IT, JACK. I'LL HOLD ON A BIT
LONGER AND THEN — TAKE MY CHANCE' (page 107)

THE FORTUNES OF THE TEAM

BY
RALPH HENRY BARBOUR

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS



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THE FORTUNES OF THE TEAM



CHAPTER I FRIENDS CONFER

DAN CLINTON pushed open the unlatched door of Number 37 with an end of a battered suitcase and closed it behind him, subduing suddenly the sounds from the third-floor corridor. When the suitcase was deposited on one end of the table, he stretched and made his way to the windows. There were two of these, set side-by-side, and both were shut save for the matter of a few inches above the sills. He rested one knee on the faded brown denim of the cushion that covered the bench beneath and raised the lower panes as high as they would go, disturbing impalpable dust and rustling the shades. The result was only slightly satisfactory, for what breeze was stirring in the valley came from the south, and the windows of Number 37 stared westward, straight at the diminishing slopes of Mount Collier and, at half-past three of a late September afternoon, almost into the eye of the sun. Along the nearer hills the trees had the appearance of waiting patiently for

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the long-delayed rains of fall. Farther away the distant Berkshires were softly violet against a hazy horizon. It was hot for the time of year; had, in fact, been hot for more than a week; and after a four-hour confinement in the train Dan felt wilted and soiled, and he speculated as he turned back toward the table as to the chance of getting a bath. Upper House, the oldest of the two dormitory buildings at Mount Collier Academy, had been built at a time when one bathtub had been considered sufficient to a floor, and, although two others had been subsequently crowded in, the number was still inadequate, and more baths were taken under the showers at the gymnasium than in Upper House.

Dan removed coat and vest, collar and tie; considered discarding his pale blue shirt as well, but compromised finally by rolling the sleeves above his elbows. He felt a little cooler now, and, while the bath project still simmered in the back of his mind, he decided to get the contents of his bag stowed away before the arrival of his trunk should present a new task. After all, that bath would feel better later on, and when he had luxuriated in it he could lie down awhile before getting ready for supper. He was a wide-shouldered boy, wide-shouldered and deep-chested. For his age, which was well over seventeen, he appeared rather large, and a somewhat mobile and placid countenance and a manner self-contained and

confident helped to make him appear older than he was. His face was plain but not ill-featured, with a broad forehead, steady brown eyes, a short, straight nose, a generous mouth and a rather square chin. He was well tanned and looked strong and healthy, which he was. He was pulling at a strap when a fist pounded on the door and, in response to his invitation, a younger and slighter fellow entered.

There were greetings and a hand-shake, and Lester Wrenn smilingly perched himself on the arm of a chair. 'Have a good summer?' he asked.

'Pretty fair. You?'

'Oh, yes. Same old thing. Mother's not so well and I stayed pretty close most of the time. Sort of a numb crowd at the beach this year. Got away for two weeks in August and went up to Canada with Greg.'

'How is he?'

'Oh, fine. He's having a pow-wow with Buster Crolle. Greg's math is bothering him a bit. He was supposed to do quite a lot of work, you know, but the poor chap was much too busy. I say, where's ——' Then the visitor's expressive face sobered. 'Gosh, Dan, I forgot!' he added apologetically.

'Ned? Yes, it does seem funny not to have the old beggar about, doesn't it? I'm going to miss him a lot.'

'Of course. Heard from him lately? How is he?'

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'Had a letter about a month ago. They were in Germany then; some place I can't pronounce. I gathered that he was coming on pretty well. They're taking him to Arizona later.'

'Think he'll pull out all right?' asked the other dubiously.

'Oh, yes. It's only one lung, you see, and they got after it in time. In a way, that pleurisy of his last May was lucky because if he hadn't had it they wouldn't have known about the business and it might have got along too far. He says he's going to tutor this winter and, if he can, come back next fall. I hope he does.'

'So do I.' Then Lester Wrenn's good-looking countenance brightened. 'Who's in with you this year? Have you heard?'

'Yes. Fellow named Devitt. From some place in New Jersey.'

'Devitt? Guess I never met him. Upper Middle?'

'Oh, he's new. Just entering. Yes, he's U.M. I guess he's all right. Can't be helped if he isn't. Heck, Jenny, I didn't know any of the Lower House bunch I wanted in here, and so I left it with the Office. Mr. Towne seemed to think I'd drawn a prize, but he'd say that anyway. Well, I'm not hard to get along with, if I do say it as shouldn't.'

'Bring him over when he lands and let's have a look at him. What's the difficulty?'

Dan, with a shirt and some socks in his hands, was standing irresolutely in front of one of the two chiffoniers. He smiled. 'Just trying to decide which I'd take,' he explained. 'This one has a knob off the lower drawer and the other one has a drawer that sticks like the dickens. Guess I'll keep this one, though. I can get a new knob at Lowrey's, I dare say.'

Lester chuckled. 'You've been getting that knob ever since last fall, Dan. Look here, why don't you take a piece of heavy twine, stick it through the hole, make a good big knot ——'

He was interrupted by an exclamation of triumph from Dan. 'I wondered where that had got to. Gosh, I'm glad to find it!' He held up the object between thumb and finger and Lester regarded it frowningly.

'What is it?' he asked. 'A collar stud? Well, for Pete's sake! I thought you'd found a diamond!'

'Best one I ever had,' replied Dan solemnly. 'I'm mighty fond of it. Thought I'd lost it.'

'Must be a great relief to you. What is it? Solid brass?'

'Well, I wouldn't like to go so far as to say that,' answered Dan as he placed his apparel in the drawer. 'Maybe it's only brass-plated. It's awful how you get cheated these days. Who's here, Jenny?'

'Oh, quite a bunch. Most of the football crowd. Say, what do you think? Coach nailed Mac and

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"Pebble" and Pen Stoulson and two or three others at the station when the early train came in and suggested that it would be real nice if they got in a little work this afternoon!"

'Get out! Gene must be crazy.'

'Sure! He was downstairs about an hour ago and I had a talk with him. He's just bustin' with ambition, Dan. Told me he was at one of those coaching schools, you know, for a couple of weeks, and was full of it. Has about a million wonderful plays he's picked up, all diagramed as neat as you like. He showed me some of them. Honest, Dan, you couldn't run through one of them without getting tangled up with every other guy on the team! I told him they looked frightfully interesting, and he was quite pleased.'

Dan grinned. 'That's like him,' he said. 'Last year, if you remember, he spent a good two weeks trying out a bunch of weird plays and got us all twisted into knots. Then he scrapped the whole lot and we went up against Lawrence with just seven plays.'

'And got licked,' added Lester regretfully. 'Sometimes I think we'd do better with a coach who wasn't so fearfully up-to-date, Dan. You know the sort; one of the old-fashioned kind whose idea of something startlingly new is a criss-cross and who teaches such simple things as tackling and holding onto the ball and getting through. I like Gene Hopkins all right, but I

wish he wasn't quite so young or quite so — so enthusiastic.'

'Yes, he's a little strong on the trimmings and a little weak on the solid stuff. That's why we got licked last fall, I think. We knew a lot of the higher branches of football, but we hadn't been taught — not well enough, anyhow — the ground stuff. But one thing's pretty certain, old man, and that is that Coach will try mighty hard this year to land the team. He has only a two-year contract and this is the last of the two. And what happened last fall isn't any bright blue feather in his cap!'

'Well, he's certainly rearing to go, Dan! He told me that if he could have his way we'd be doing two sessions every day. Yes, sir, Gene's all het up. And he says we've got a wonderful chance to beat the world this fall. Honest, you'd be almost sorry for Lawrence if you heard him tell how good we are!'

'Ought to be is what he really means. Of course we've got a nice bunch of last year's team left and some pretty promising new material, but it's no better than we had two years ago, Latimer's last year with us, and we got beaten badly. Only won four of our eight and lost to Lawrence by 17 to 3, wasn't it? So you can't tell, and Gene would do better if he talked less about how good we are and let us think we were just average rotten; which we may be when we start to play '

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'Yes. Well, he's certainly whooping it up, and he seems to have made an impression, for I've heard mighty little but football since I got here. Why, some fellows have already got it figured out that we're to lick Lawrence by — well, I forget the exact score; something like forty to nothing, I think!'

Dan smiled as he inverted the empty suitcase, smote it with the flat of a broad hand, and stowed it on the shelf of his closet. 'Fred come yet?' he asked, subsiding on his bed and resting his shoulders against the wall.

'Haven't seen him. He's probably coming on the four-twenty. "Plug's" on hand, though. He and Gene almost embraced when they met. Just like long-lost brothers or something, they were. All I got from Gene was a hand-shake. Think that's nice?'

'All you deserved, of course. Plug's our local back-field hero and you're just a plodding end.'

'Who says so? Where do you get that plodding stuff? I want you to know I'm brilliant, consarn ye! I'm one of those dashing, romantical figures you read about in the best football literature. Oh, well, Timmy loves me, and if you can't make a hit with the coach it's something to stand in with the trainer. Say, Dan, did you ever hear how much Gene gets here?'

'Salary? N-no, but it's been generally believed that he pulls down fifteen hundred or close to it.'

'Not so much, eh?' said Lester consideringly. 'Still, for only a couple of months ——'

'Sometimes I've thought,' interrupted Dan, 'that it would have been better to have paid another fifty cents.'

Lester chuckled. 'You never did cotton to Gene much, did you?'

'I like him well enough as a fellow, but no one's ever convinced me yet, Jenny, that Gene is a really good coach. Even for a prep school, and you don't expect much from a school coach.'

'Oh, I say, there are some corking ones!'

'Well, maybe, but if they're corking they don't stay at the school long. Some college grabs 'em. I don't believe any college will ever kidnap Gene Hopkins. He's sort of a nice chap, of course; popular with the crowd and the school generally; good-looking, affable, full of enthusiasm. Works hard, too. But he's only about twenty-six, and that's too young. What we ought to have here is a man of about forty who's spent a lot of time handling prep school players and knows how to work 'em. Gene doesn't. For one thing he's too near our own age; there's too much of the 'we're-all-boys-together' stuff about him. I like a coach I can be a bit scared of, Jenny, some chap who I'm dead certain knows more than I do. And Gene doesn't let me get scared of him and he won't let me think he knows much more football than I know.'

'Gosh, you seem to have given him a lot of thought!'

'Oh, no, only that's the way I think about him and always have. We get on all right, but I don't fall for his winning ways as some of the crowd do.'

'Oh, well, I guess he means all right. Look here, have you got to stick around for the new "roomy"? What's the matter with coming across and seeing old Greg? Got something I want to show you, too. Come on.'

'No, I don't have to stay here to welcome — What did I say his name was?'

'Devitt or something, wasn't it?'

'Yes, Devitt. Wonder if that's Irish. Sort of sounds Irish, doesn't it? Anyhow, I don't know when he's coming, and——Look here, though, I've *got* to have a bath.'

'Any one can see that,' agreed Lester pleasantly, 'but there's lots of time. You've got two hours yet.'

Dan shook his head as he glanced at his watch. 'Wrong, son; only an hour and thirty-four minutes. But I'll come over long enough to speak to Greg if you think he's back.'

'Must be by now. He went half an hour ago.'

'All right, lead on. Hot, isn't it? Wonder why the best of the summer always comes along after a fellow's through his vacation. Never knew it to fail!'

They went out, leaving the door ajar, as Dan

explained, so the expressman wouldn't find an excuse to dump his trunk in the corridor. The portal of Number 38, almost opposite, crashed open and voices mingled exclamatorily. Evidently Gregory Knight was at home.

CHAPTER II

A FELLOW NAMED DEVITT

JOHN CYRIL LACON DEVITT alighted from the four-twenty train burdened with a large kit-bag, a light gray overcoat and considerable curiosity. Since he had never yet seen the Town of Westdale nor Mount Collier Academy, was, in fact, an utter stranger to this corner of the world, his curiosity was quite natural. Then, too, he knew nothing, save what little he had read, of American preparatory schools, and all the way from East Ogden he had been just a trifle depressed by the intruding fear that the approaching experiment was not to prove a wise one. When I state that to himself John Cyril Lacon Devitt thought of Mount Collier Academy as a 'public school,' you will doubtless conclude, and correctly, that he was English. If more evidence was required it was only necessary to take a good look at him. He was seventeen years of age and looked neither more nor less. He was slight rather than stout, although there was no hint of weakness in the body. He had brown hair — well, yes, brown for want of a better word; a light shade of brown that held a suggestion of ashiness; gray eyes and a good deal of color under a smooth, slightly tanned skin. For the rest he

was distinctly good-looking in a lean way; by which is meant that his cheek bones were a bit prominent, his nose straight and thin, and his chin a trifle sharp. Rather a bony countenance, but well-featured, and lighted by an expression of good-temper and eager interest.

He was only one of more than fifty fellows alighting from the train, and since, in spite of having spent more than half his life out of England, he still retained some reticence, he had made no acquaintances *en route*. As a result he was at a momentary loss and stood through many precious seconds, bag in hand, beside the car. When he finally followed the others around to the back of the small station, it was to discover that the two horse-drawn 'barges' and the three decrepit motor cabs were already filled and overflowing. One of three youths perched on the sagging steps of a barge would have yielded a share of his precarious location, but the new boy declined the offer. Instead he tossed his bag to the driver, and, well enough satisfied, set forth afoot. The gravelled space behind the brown-hued station merged into a hard highway, and the dust from the vehicles ahead of him lessened and he saw the last of them swing to the right and suffer eclipse where a covered bridge spanned the hurrying waters of a narrow river. It was cool in the echoing twilight of the bridge and the traveler removed his straw hat and mopped a moist brow. The overcoat, as

light as it was, seemed very unnecessary just now. Sunlight streaked one side of the shed with hot, golden bars where the old boards had shrunk apart and he avoided it with his eyes. All too soon he was out in the afternoon glare once more, and he shifted his overcoat and replaced his hat.

At his right, beyond a descending slope of grass and weeds and rushes, the stream was in sight for some distance, shallow by reason of a long drought, its bed crowded near at hand with granite boulders worn smooth by the floods. He wondered if there were fish there, perhaps trout, sent his gaze farther, found it defeated by a small abrupt bluff, and turned away. Ahead the road curved leisurely to the right and the village presented itself, at first by the backs and littered yards of the buildings nearer the stream and then, as he progressed, by small dwellings, often white with green shutters, and the beginning of a line of stores. The road branched where the buildings closed in and he had a choice of two thoroughfares, one of which led straight ahead and the other into the village. After a moment of doubt he descried a none-too-legible sign: 'Mount Collier Academy.' His way skirted the town, although at his right modest dwellings kept him company for the matter of three long blocks and, to his left, several farmhouses dotted the fields. What engaged his attention most interestingly, however, was the big sugar-loaf mountain that curved up

out of the valley no more than a mile away. That, he guessed, was the feature from which the school took its name. A square of farming land lay up-edged against the lower slope, the forest rising about it on three sides. On the summit stood what puzzled the boy for a moment; until he made it out to be an observatory or perhaps one of those lookout towers used by the fire wardens. He viewed it approvingly. Very soon, he told himself, he would climb that slope, and it added to his satisfaction to have so evident a goal awaiting him.

He didn't have to look for directions when a street turned off at a right angle, for above a group of maples beyond an iron picket fence the roofs of the Academy buildings showed. Near by, set amongst the trees, was a two-story wooden residence which his recollection of the pictures in the school catalogue told him was that of the Principal, Doctor Allen. A few rods farther he came to the main gate, drew aside to allow an automobile to emerge, and entered the grounds. A tar-surfaced drive led straight to the middle one of five structures which faced him. All were of similar brick and stone construction with slate roofs and were set well apart in a curving row. The Chapel stood behind the Principal's house, followed in turn along the arc by Lower House, Academy Hall, Upper House, and the gymnasium. Between the first two, as he went up the slightly as-

ceding approach, he glimpsed a seventh structure farther away, evidently a stable or garage, or perhaps both. At his left the group of trees occupied much of the space, but they yielded to an expanse of well-kept turf near the driveway and before the buildings, while on his right, save for a few formal beds of flowers and a row of maples along the public road, the grass stretched away to the playing field and, beyond, to the farther confines of the school property.

Mount Collier Academy accommodated two hundred students, and it looked to the arrival as though most of the number were in sight. Several fellows who had, apparently, made the journey on foot by way of the town were preceding him toward the wide entrance of Academy, others were coming and going along the flagged path in front of the buildings, still others were in evidence at the open windows of the two dormitories, and groups of fellows were seated on the steps. Conscious of the interested regard of the latter, the newcomer set his gaze straight ahead and followed the other arrivals into the hall. A few minutes later he had selected his bag from a number still awaiting claimants and was outside once more. Upper House stood a short distance away and he gained it under the close observation of a number of its occupants who craned from their windows to appraise the stranger. Two flights of stone stairs brought him to his corridor, and near at

hand a slightly open door bore the numerals 37. He pushed it open, viewed its emptiness with approval, and, following the example set by Dan Clinton, divested himself of coat, collar, and tie. Since he wore no waistcoat, he couldn't very well emulate Dan as to that article. After sitting idly for a few moments to recover his breath and cool off, he unpacked his bag, placing the contents in the unoccupied chiffonier. When that was done he stowed the bag on the floor of the closet — it just wouldn't go on the shelf — and himself on the window-seat. It was rather sunny there, but the breeze had increased and what air entered held a pleasant suggestion of coolness to follow. It smelled sweetly, too; of late clover and grasses and sun-warmed soil; and he breathed it in gratefully as, one knee clasped in his hands, he stared across at the wooded hills. And there, a few minutes later, Dan discovered him.

They were back there after supper, Dan in an armchair drawn close to the window and his new roommate again occupying the seat. It was refreshingly cool, although the sunlight still illuminated the higher hills. Dan, sprawled in coatless comfort, was doing the talking just now.

'You'll like it all right after you've got used to it,' he said reassuringly. 'I suppose you'll find it sort of different from your English schools, though. Not that I know much about them, naturally; only what I've gathered from reading some

of your stories; Tom Brown, of course, and — one or two more; forget the names. We don't have "forms" and we don't have "fagging" — That's what you call it, eh?

'Yes, but I don't know much more about English public schools than you do, Clinton. You see, I've been over here almost ten years. Father came right after the war and mother and I followed about three months later. I've lived in New York and New Jersey ever since. Before that I had a bit of schooling at home in Westdale, but ——'

'Westdale!' exclaimed Dan.

'Yes, that's where we lived. The school was just a small affair; about a dozen of us ——'

'Well, you know, this town's called Westdale, too!'

The other smiled and nodded. 'I know. That's why — I say, don't tell any one, Clinton, but that's why I decided on this school. Mother left it pretty much to me, and I thought it would seem rather like being home to go to a place called Westdale. Of course I don't really look on England as home any longer, but the name being the same — well, you understand.'

'Yes. But I guess you won't find 'em much alike!' Dan chuckled. 'This town's rather a hole, Devitt. Oh, it's all right, but it's not likely to remind you of England! There isn't much here besides the school — and a metal box factory

across the river. Springville's not so bad, though. That's thirty miles south and you can make it on the train in three quarters of an hour. That's where Lawrence is, you know.'

'Who,' asked the other politely, 'is Lawrence? Should I know?'

Dan laughed. 'Lawrence School, I mean. It's Lawrence we play our big games with. By the way, you don't play football, by any chance?'

'Oh, yes, I've played some. I was on the High School team last fall. We had a pretty good eleven, too, last year.'

'Then you'll be going out for it here? Good! That makes two of us. Where did you play?'

'At East Ogden, New Jersey. Oh, you mean what position! I was a half-back.'

Dan frowned. 'H'm, not so good. Better try for something else, Devitt. Look here, your name's Jack, isn't it?'

'Y-yes, John; but Jack's all right.' He didn't say that his parents called him Cyril. At High School the fact had been discovered and he had been the butt of many jests until he had proved that a Cyril could look after himself quite as well as a John. No one had ever called him Jack, but he was glad that Dan Clinton had fallen on that instead of Cyril. Oddly, to his seeming, such perfectly ordinary and common names as Cyril and Percy and Cuthbert invariably aroused amusement and even derision in this country.

'Well,' Dan was continuing, 'that's what I'll call you. My name's Daniel, after the fellow who ate the lions, or whoever it was, but I'm usually called Dan. What were we talking about? Oh, yes, about you playing half-back. You see, it's this way. We've got rather a decent back-field left over from last fall, Jack. Our best man is Plug Graves. Plug's rather a wonder as a half. Besides, he stands in mighty well with the coach. Then there's Jerry Dabney; "Dab," he's called. Dab's mighty good, too, although he isn't the slam-banger that Plug is. Greg Knight — you'll meet him this evening — played full-back last year and was a wow. Now there's the whole bunch, except, of course, the quarter, and we've got at least one good fellow on that job and a couple of prospects. So, you see, you'd have a slim chance to break in behind the line. How about trying for end? You look as though you'd make a good end, Jack. Of course we've got a couple of fellows who might be hard to beat there, too, but I really think you'll stand a better chance at an end position than in the back-field; and, of course, you're too light for guard or tackle or center.'

'I see,' said Jack. 'But I've played half a couple of seasons and I fancy I ought to stick to it. If I didn't make first place, Clint — er — Dan, I might get on as a sub. Or don't you think so?'

‘Why, you might, yes. Depends, of course, on how you show. Please yourself. I just gave you the tip for what it’s worth.’

‘I understand. Very decent of you, too. But — well, I fancy I’d rather try my luck at what I know best. What do you play?’

‘Tackle. Played on the scrub in my lower middle year and got the shift last fall. There’s a good deal of fun, by the way, to be had on the scrub. You’d still have next year for the big team. Supposing you don’t make it this year, I mean.’

‘Oh, yes,’ replied Jack in a tone that sounded rather noncommittal. ‘What do I do, by the way, about reporting for the squad? I mean to say, don’t I see the coach or anything like that?’

‘No, just show up at three-thirty to-morrow afternoon over at the field. After practice you’ll be asked your name and so on. Next day you’ll weigh-in at the gym before going to the field, and sometime during the next day or two you’ll have to get your bill-of-health from Royden. He’s in charge of the gym; looks after your physical welfare; teaches hygiene once a week. Roy listens-in at your heart and so on and gives you a blue slip if you’re all right for football. That’s about all there is to it. If you stick around a week or so you’ll get your togs and — oh, yes, you’ll want a locker right away. See Pete, over in the gym basement. You’ll have to deposit twenty-five cents, but you’ll get it back when you return the

key — if you do. I've never heard of any fellow getting his quarter back, because you pretty nearly always lose the key. Then it costs you a quarter more. I guess Pete makes a fairly good thing of it.'

'I have to pay for my togs, I fancy.'

'Some of 'em. You get pants and shirt, and the use of a head-guard. Shoes and stockings you have to pay for, but you can wear what you have if you want to unless you make the first. Of course, if you get let out you have to return your things and empty your locker. By the way, ever done anything besides football? Baseball, for instance, or hockey.'

'I've played a little baseball, but not seriously. I've never tried hockey. I don't skate very well. I did some running last spring, but our coach didn't like it and so I stopped.'

'Didn't like it? Oh, you mean the football coach!'

'Yes, he was afraid I'd do too much, I guess.'

'Sprints?'

Jack nodded. 'I wasn't much good, though. Couldn't learn a decent start, and that's about all there is to the hundred, you know.'

'How about basket-ball?'

'Never tried that. I'd like to, though. I used to go to all the games I could.'

'I'll hand you over to Gabby when the time comes. He coaches basket-ball. I play myself a

bit and so you'd better join up. Give us something to chin about. "Gabby's" Mr. Finlayson. You'll have him in English and Bible History. He's a fine chap. By the way, about your trunk. It hasn't showed up yet, has it?'

'No, I didn't bring it. Mother hadn't got my things all together, so I just brought enough to get along with for a couple of days. Shan't miss it, I fancy.'

'Well, I wondered. Coming by express, eh?'

'Why, no,' replied Jack, 'mother's bringing it with her. I didn't say anything about it, Dan, but mother's coming here to live while I'm in school. It's like this. Dad travels a lot and sometimes he's away four or five months at a time. We had just an apartment in East Ogden and so it wasn't hard to make the change. Mother would have been a bit lonely, you know, with us both away, so I said why not come here for the winter. I dare say the fellows will think I'm rather a sissy, having the mater around, but I just didn't fancy leaving her there all by herself. What do you think?'

Dan suppressed his surprise. 'Quite all right, of course. Why not?'

'Well,' said Jack doubtfully, 'I didn't know how fellows would take it. Sort of had the notion at first that I'd say nothing about it. But I don't suppose I could get away with it.'

'Why the dickens should you?' demanded Dan.

'Whose business is it, anyway? Pshaw, I'd bring my whole family with me if there was any reason for it!' He chuckled. 'I'll own up, though, that I can't just see them here! You'll want a house, I suppose.'

'Oh, no, mother would much rather board somewhere. I thought I'd take a look around to-morrow. I'd rather like her to get here by the end of the week.'

'Sure. Only thing is, I'm afraid there aren't many places here where they take boarders. Of course there's the Valley House, but she wouldn't like that. Sort of a drummers' hang-out, you know. Look here, I'll lend a hand to-morrow, Jack. I know the village better than you do, and ——' he paused. 'I'm wondering about Mrs. This-sel. Gene — that's Hopkins, the football coach — has a couple of rooms at her place, but he eats outside. Maybe, though, she might give board. We'll try her first. If she won't do it, she may know some one who will. We'll find something!'

'That's awfully decent of you,' said Jack warmly. 'I was going to ask you if you knew of some place, but it's a bit thick making you tag around with me.'

'Pshaw, I'll enjoy it. What about drifting across the hall and meeting a couple of fellows I want you to know? They're both football men and quite the right sort. They asked me to fetch you over. Care about it?'

'Very much,' assented Jack, 'if you're quite certain they'll like it. I mean to say, we're quite ordinary folks and haven't much money, and ——'

'Oh, don't be an ass,' begged Dan pleasantly.

CHAPTER III

COACH HOPKINS COMMENDS

'WHO's the fair-haired lad puntin' the ball over there?' inquired Timmy McRaig. The trainer's real name was Timothy, but no one called him anything save Timmy; unless, perhaps, it was an occasional junior, in which case it was 'Mr. McRaig.' He was a good American, was Timmy, and he would tell you so without much inducement, but further inquiry would elicit the fact that his father was Irish and his mother Scotch and that he had appeared on the scene in the steerage of a steamship some six hundred miles out of Southampton. He was short, broad, ruddy-faced, and green-eyed. He wore a drooping mustache, of which he was extremely proud, and had a voice that could croon a ballad in falsetto one moment and roar like the Bull of Bashan the next. He was a good trainer, understood boys thoroughly, and was very popular among them. In age he was, so far as any one knew to the contrary, about forty, and he had been at Mount Collier Academy nine years this very month. Just now he was sitting on the end of the scarred wooden bench under the shade of the grandstand and putting a new lace into a cleated shoe, his green eyes lifting from the task to scan the field at intervals.

'His name's Devitt,' answered Manager Hal Laidlaw. 'He's English, I hear.'

'Ain't that a pity now? A fine-looking lad like him. How's it come he's here, then?'

'Oh, his folks have been living on this side for some time, I believe. Looks pretty good, doesn't he, Timmy?'

'Sure. He's played the game before, that feller. Where's he from, Mr. Laidlaw?'

'I don't know that.'

'Well,' commented Timmy rather more to the shoe than to the boy standing beside him, 'he may be English, but he sure kicks that ball American!' Then, addressing the manager again, 'He needs weight on him, though,' he continued, 'but I'm betting you can't put it there. You can't make it stick on his sort. Ever notice that?'

'Oh, yes,' agreed Hal. But he had lost interest in the topic. 'What about the new helmets, Timmy? How do they look?'

'All right, but for what they cost us they ain't worth writing home about. You don't get the leather in 'em you used to.'

'Got one out here?' Hal looked inquiringly at the wheelbarrow near by.

'I have not,' replied Timmy indignantly. 'There's plenty of old ones yet. You'll not see a new head-guard till I can't patch these any more. You're a fine manager, conniving at extravagance like that!'

Hal Laidlaw laughed. 'It's a wonder you don't put a string in there, Timmy, instead of a leather lace. Think what you'd be saving!'

Timmy shook his head regretfully. 'I tried cod-line one time, but it didn't work. There's no give to it and it cut the boys' feet. If they'd make 'em with elastic sides like the shoes my old dad used to wear when he dressed himself for a shindig, we'd save money.'

Hal laughed, saw Coach Hopkins beckoning, and hurried away, instinctively thumbing the black-covered, loose-leaf book which was the emblem of his office.

Fall Term at Mount Collier was five days old and this was Monday afternoon, and the time was close to five o'clock. The weather had altered for the better on Saturday, and, while the long-expected showers still held off, the wind had swung into the northwest and light breezes subdued the heat. Football practice to-day was the most strenuous and protracted of the four sessions so far held. Coach Hopkins had been easy enough with the forty or so candidates who had reported so long as the extremely warm weather had lasted, but to-day, with a fresh breeze blowing, he had given rein to his enthusiasm and to the somewhat feverish impatience which seemed to possess him this fall, and had driven the fellows hard. Fortunately for his plan, which appeared to be to bring order out of chaos in the least pos-

sible time and put a smooth, smart eleven against Peterboro High next Saturday, his enthusiasm was contagious, and not only the candidates, or at least a large majority of them, were with him, but the school too. Not for several years had football taken hold so early and so completely. In view of the fact that eight weeks must pass before the Blue-and-Russet and the Crimson met, the present furor was somewhat remarkable. It was difficult to keep fellows from the subject of the Lawrence game for long; no matter how a conversation started, sooner or later it would swing around to the school's chances of revenge for two consecutive defeats at the hands of the ancient rival. The 'dopesters' were already at work, although it was difficult to imagine the basis for their calculations. And while a decisive victory over Lawrence was the chief end in view, there was a strong and increasing sentiment in favor of a clean record. 'Eight wins and no defeats' had become a popular slogan, and an unprecedented confidence in the ability of the team imbued many with the belief that it might come through the season without a reverse.

Whether Coach Hopkins had formulated that slogan no one could say, but certain it was that from the first day of school he had constantly and diligently shed optimism and enthusiasm. Perhaps he fully believed what he preached when he declared that this fall the Blue-and-Russet was

to come into its own and defeat the schemes and machinations of a hitherto too-powerful enemy. Gene, as he was called behind his back, was a born optimist and capable of intense enthusiasms. He had played football at school and college, and not so very long ago, without attaining much fame, and had at once sought and found work as a coach. His record was not startling. He had secured fair success in his first berth and had taken hold at Mount Collier last fall. He had imbued the team with a fine belief in itself and had led it through two or three notable victories before the final test. But against Lawrence more than confidence was needed, and the Blue-and-Russet showed itself lamentably wanting in some of the fundamental arts of the game, with the result that a very one-sided score had eventuated, with Mount Collier on the short end of it. There had ensued a perceptible reaction against the coach, but he had a two-year contract, and now he was back again more convincing than ever, and those who had criticized last November were once more under the spell of his personality. For Coach Hopkins had personality and good looks and a persuasive tongue, and even the players who had taken part in that disappointing engagement with Lawrence a year ago, or nine tenths of them, were again firm in their belief in Gene, self-persuaded that no blame attached to him for what had happened.

It was hard not to like him. He was scarcely

more than a boy himself, a fact he traded on most satisfactorily. The I'm-only-a-little-older-than-you attitude had its effect. Incipient dissatisfaction with his methods or results was quashed with: 'Well, what do you expect from a fellow only just out of college? Give him time! Of course he doesn't know as much as some of these guys who have been at it for years. He doesn't pretend to. He's no Rockne, and he knows it, but he's a fine chap!' In appearance Eugene Hopkins was of average height, rather heavy, with a round, smiling face, brown hair that waved back from a smooth, tanned forehead, and a pair of brown eyes that were his best and most effective feature. When Gene's countenance lighted up with enthusiasm and his eyes flashed, you were all set to accept as gospel every word that fell from his lips. He had a good voice and used it persuasively when the necessity arrived. He knew how to talk to fellows of his own age and to those younger; and he knew quite as well how to abandon colloquial eloquence and gestures and speak just as persuasively to older persons. It was a well-known fact that Doctor Allen, the Principal, held the coach in high esteem. Of course he had his detractors, both amongst the students and the faculty, but so it always is.

Coach Hopkins had some reason for his confidence this fall, since he was starting the campaign with a seasoned team. To be sure, it was a

team that had been beaten last year, but it is just as easy to argue one way as another from that premise. Gene chose to consider that a beaten team has learned its lesson from defeat and will not conceivably fall again into the errors that led to its downfall. Also that a team who has taken the count once will be more eager than another to secure victory. Good reasoning, certainly. And maybe the coach also counted on the law of averages, which is notably opposed to allowing the same number to appear consecutively on the wheel of chance and, in like manner, a football team to win two years running. Mount Collier was starting off with eight of those who had begun the first or third periods against Lawrence last November still in harness. Her back-field was intact and four of her line were veterans. Besides those eight she possessed at least six second-string players who had seen much service in the last campaign, several promising recruits from the scrub and dormitory teams, and perhaps two — certainly one newcomer who had already shown real ability. The back-field — Weeks, Graves, Dabney, and Knight — was about all that any coach could ask for, and in the line Captain Way, Pen Stoulson, Dan Clinton, and Lester Wrenn supplied a satisfactory nucleus. These, then, with what material was plainly at hand, were sufficient to excuse optimism in any coach and more than sufficient in the case of Gene Hopkins.

Jack, having swung his foot against a ball and sped it arching across the gridiron, watched its flight critically until a voice at his shoulder interrupted. 'Mighty nice, Devitt,' said Coach Hopkins. 'Good height and direction. Hanged if I don't think I can make a punter out of you!' He smiled engagingly and Jack felt at once confused and pleased. He couldn't understand Dan's lack of enthusiasm for the coach. Himself, he thought Gene pretty fine, and would have worked his head off to please him. This was only the second time that the coach had spoken to him, but, as on Saturday, the speech had been cordial and approving. Jack didn't think of anything to say in reply and so shifted his gaze to the returning ball. He made rather a botch of catching the relay throw from Cumnock; had it, but dropped it, and was forced to trot back across the running track to retrieve it. He wished it hadn't happened so just when Gene was watching. But the coach appeared not to have noticed the boy's awkwardness; perhaps he guessed that it was due to embarrassment; and resumed, as Jack approached: 'There's just one thing, though, old man. You shorten your second stride. Try making your first step short and your next one long. It's sort of hard to explain, but a long stride adds a kind of impetus to the body and makes it natural to put more drive into the kick. Let me see that a minute.' Jack handed him the ball. 'I'm not sure I

can illustrate very well, Devitt, for I never did much punting; legs too short, I guess; but this is the idea.'

Coach Hopkins tossed the ball in his hands as though catching it, turned the lacings up, cocked it, took a short, quick step off his left foot, a longer one off his right, and swung. But he didn't drop the ball to meet the rising foot, and Jack's admiration faltered. He felt that the coach ought to have tried the kick, even if he had made a mess of it. But the latter's explanation sufficed. 'No use wasting time making those fellows chase it,' he said carelessly. 'Here you are. Give it a try.'

Rather dubiously Jack obeyed, but the coach's method was different and the result was a 'dud' that went skimming off at a tangent. He looked around apologetically, but, to his surprise and, presently, his relief, the coach had gone along to the next punter. Jack wondered if he had remained long enough to watch the kick. It didn't seem that he could have.

Jack strove conscientiously to profit by the example set him, but he had become used to his own way and the resulting punts were short or misdirected or both. He thought he discerned surprise and even reproach on the faces of the catchers across the field. Perhaps, if the word to quit hadn't come just then, he might have mastered the new method, although he doubted it. The next day he returned guiltily to his own way with

profit to his work, and, although he expected the coach to discover his dereliction and make a protest, that never happened.

Dan was awaiting him at the bench and the two tramped over to the gymnasium together, both a bit wearied and grimy and hot.

'Gene's going to spring a new one,' remarked Dan presently. 'Heard him talking about it with Plug and Fred just now. Say, that's funny!'

'What is?' asked Jack.

Dan chuckled before he made answer. 'Why, putting it like that; "Plug and Fred." You don't get it, eh?'

Jack shook his head helplessly. 'I'm afraid I don't, Dan.'

'Well, Fred happens to be captain, you know. Doesn't it strike you that the natural thing to say would be "Fred and Plug"? Sure! But unconsciously, old son, I put the — the values just where they belong.'

'Any one kick you on the head this afternoon?' inquired Jack concernedly.

Dan grinned. 'Sound crazy, do I? Listen. Fred Way's captain here, Jack, but who, after all, is the Big Boy?'

'Coach Hopkins?'

'I meant on the team, son. Whom do you see Gene hobnobbing with most?'

'Plug Graves?'

'Sure as you're born. I'll bet Plug knows what's

going on, what Gene has in his bean twenty-four hours before Fred hears of it! And it never occurred to me before, either. Yes, sir, Fred may be captain of this aggregation, but I'll be switched if Plug isn't doing the job for him! You take notice, Jack. When Gene goes into conference, it's Plug that's with him more than half the time. After they've settled things their way, they call Fred over and let him in on it.'

'You don't like the coach much, do you?' asked Jack.

'As a coach?' Dan looked about, saw that none of the others were close enough to overhear and sank his voice. 'Not a whole lot, Jack. I guess he's a pretty good fellow off the field, and I wouldn't say a word against him if he were coaching Lawrence, but as a coach for Mount Collier Academy, in which I'm more or less interested, I think he's a flat-tire. Mind you, this is confidential. And it's not to affect your regard for the chap. If you like him and think he's all right, go ahead. Besides, I may be all wrong. He may be one of the swellest little coaches that ever bawled out a squad. Only I don't think so. And, anyway, he never did bawl any one out and it would be a heap sight better for all concerned if he did!'

Jack laughed as they went up the steps together. 'Fancy taking a dislike to a fellow because he doesn't get rough with you!'

'It isn't only that,' replied Dan as he pushed

open the heavy door. 'To my mind he just isn't good enough for the job. Going downtown before supper?'

'I think I shall if there's time. I promised I would.'

'Time enough. I'll walk along, if you don't mind and wait for you.'

'Wait for me? Why? Can't you come in a minute?'

'Oh, sure, but I don't want your mother to think me a blamed nuisance, always showing up with you and ——'

'Silly ass! Why, the mater thinks a lot of you, Dan. Bored me to tears Sunday expatiating on your virtues.'

'Honest?' Dan beamed. 'You're not stringing?'

'Not a bit. She's just as appreciative as I am of the way you've shown me around and made things easy.'

'Oh, piffle! That's nothing at all. But — well, all right. Wait for me here when you're ready.'

CHAPTER IV

DAN BUYS ROSES

JACK, with Dan assisting, had secured accommodations for his mother at Mrs. Thissel's on Thursday, and on Saturday noon Mrs. Devitt had arrived and taken possession of two connecting rooms on the second floor of the small white house. It had taken some persuasion to induce Mrs. Thissel to serve meals. She never had done that, she had objected, and it meant a lot of trouble, and what suited some folks didn't suit others, and she didn't have any dining-room nowadays because Mr. Hopkins had that and the parlor, and she didn't like to ask a lady to eat in the kitchen, although she would say that her kitchen was every mite as clean and tidy as a good many dining-rooms she might mention. Mrs. Thissel had paused for breath finally, and Dan had taken advantage of the opportunity with such success that the landlady had in the end given reluctant consent to the proposal. 'Only, mind you,' she had declared, 'it's just to give it a trial. I'll try it for a week, and then if the lady ain't satisfied or I ain't satisfied she'll have to eat out, though I don't know where she'd go, because from what I hear the Valley House ain't what it was when Jeff

Handy run it, and as for that Greek place I guess a body'd have to have a pretty strong stomach to stand the smell, let alone eat the victuals. Miss Mason runs a sort of tea-room — she calls it a "shoppy" — over by the common, but I hear you can't get much but canned soup and sandwiches at her place, and it don't seem to me I'd get much pleasure eating soup that's stood around in a can on Henry Wason's shelves for maybe six months! Every one knows he don't buy his groceries but twice a year.'

But the possibility of Jack's mother being obliged to 'eat out' seemed to have already vanished. Mrs. Devitt declared that the meals were delightful, that Mrs. Thissel was kindness itself, and that she was quite certain that they would get along beautifully. Dan secretly thought that any one who couldn't get along with Mrs. Devitt and like doing it must have something radically wrong with him, for of Dan that lady had made instant conquest. She was small; Jack already topped her by an inch or so; and she was awfully pretty, Dan considered, even if her almost black hair was well threaded with silver, and she had the loveliest sort of voice, soft and light, and a perfectly delicious and far too infrequent laugh. Dan got quite a kick, too, from her pronunciation, for, while Jack had sedulously, even avidly, sought to pattern his speech and manners on those of his American companions, Mrs. Devitt's were still

unmistakably English. There was something so gentle and appealing about Jack's mother that Dan felt big and protective and for her sake would have gone forth blithely, in the manner of the knights of old, and slain a dragon — that is, of course, if he could have found one and if its extermination would have given Mrs. Devitt the least gratification. As, however, the lady professed no desire to have a dragon killed for her benefit, Dan had to devote himself to more commonplace deeds; such, for instance, as helping Jack move the furniture about and carry the three empty trunks up to the attic and running errands to the shops for tacks and shelf paper and various other items necessary to Mrs. Devitt's settling process. Of course Dan tried to cheat a bit; forgot the price of things in a chivalrous attempt to bestow benefits; but, while it wouldn't have been difficult to hoodwink Jack's mother, Jack himself wouldn't be fooled.

'You still owe him ten cents for the thumb-tacks, dear. Don't let him fool you.' And then, detecting a triumphant gleam in Dan's eye, 'Oh, by Jove, yes! And the glue we fixed the bag with. How much was that, you beggar?'

'Glue?' Dan tried to look as though the word conveyed no meaning to him. 'Oh, the *glue*! Why, let's see. I think the glue was — er — ten cents, too, but I'm not certain he charged for that. Come to think of it, Jack, I don't think he

— oh, all right, ten cents, if you've got to be so rotten fussy!'

This afternoon, striding along beside Jack after practice, Dan was strangely silent. Jack thought he must have something important or perplexing on his mind and so presently ceased carrying on the very one-sided conversation and lapsed into silence. For some reason Dan had suggested going down River Street instead of Center, although Center, which held the few shops which catered especially to the students, was the thoroughfare almost invariably used by them. Not that it made a mite of difference in the distance to be traveled, however. Halfway between Academy and Tanner Streets, in the last of which was Mrs. Thissel's abode, a blind lane known as Holt's Court led off to the left, and it was when they were just short of it that Dan's pace perceptibly slowed. Jack accommodated his steps to his companion's and looked an inquiry. Dan was visibly concerned, though with what Jack couldn't imagine.

'What's the idea?' the latter asked. 'Tired?'

'Er — no,' answered Dan, walking more slowly yet. If it hadn't seemed so preposterous Jack would have said that his friend was embarrassed. Dan cleared his throat noisily. 'Tired? Of course not!' Then, with a carelessness palpably assumed and a smile that Jack afterwards described to himself as positively sickening, Dan said: 'I was

— er — just thinking, Jack, that your mother hasn't any flowers in her rooms. You know how a bunch of flowers — er — dresses a place up, eh? Women like 'em, too, I guess. I was just thinking ——'

'All right, but where do we get flowers? I don't see any.'

Dan looked vastly relieved then. 'Oh, the greenhouse is just up at the end of this court. I thought we might just go in there and get a few — a few — whatever there is, you know. That is, I might. You don't think your mother would — would think it fresh if I took some, do you?'

'I think she'd be very pleased,' replied Jack gravely. 'Nice of you to think of it, Dan.'

Dan waved the credit aside quite superbly. 'Not at all. It simply occurred to me that — well — come on and see what he's got.'

For one thing, Mr. Holt had roses, and Dan purchased a dozen of them. Jack thought that it might have been better if the purchaser had selected twelve of the same color, or, at the most, of two colors, but he kept the thought to himself. Dan fussily insisted on three red ones, three white ones, three yellow ones, and three pink ones. Then he declined to accept them in paper and the rather mouse-colored little florist had to do a sort of sleight-of-hand trick with two sheets of cardboard. The miraculous way in which he folded them into a long carton interested Jack so much

that he forgot to fret over the wasted time. Returning along the court, Dan looked vastly smug and satisfied until, at the corner, he suddenly stopped abruptly to demand in tones fraught with anxiety: 'Look here, Jack, she — she doesn't have hay-fever, does she?'

'What? Mother? Of course not! Why?'

'That's good!' Dan moved on again. 'Folks who are subject to hay-fever don't like flowers about, you know. I've an aunt who can't stand 'em. She came to lunch once and mother had three artificial pond-lilies floating in a bowl on the table and Aunt Virginia nearly sneezed her head off before mother knew what was wrong and could tell her the things weren't real!'

Mrs. Devitt was very pleased with the flowers, although she scolded Dan for his extravagance, and Dan assumed a most lordly air and tried very hard to look like one to whom the presentation of flowers to charming ladies was an everyday occurrence. Jack behaved very well, and if he grinned a little he was careful to see that Dan didn't observe it. Mrs. Devitt had managed to make the front room look very pleasant and homelike with a very few effects. The old marble-topped table was well hidden under a gay square of Oriental embroidery, there were several cushions scattered about, a little primrose-hued tea service stood by the side window, a blue silken cozy making a gallant spot of color beside it,

and numerous small pictures and photographs were in place against the faded striped wall-paper and along the white marble mantel. It was, Dan told himself admiringly, just wonderful what a woman could do to a room!

Dan had helped in the distribution of the pictures and Jack had explained them to him. There was one, a faded photograph, of a quaint stone house with many trees and much ivy about it which had been Mrs. Devitt's home after she married. It was very English, Dan concluded, and rather dampish; but he didn't mention the last conclusion. Then there was a picture of a long-visaged, extremely smug-looking gentleman named Sir George Lacon, who, he gathered, was a relation of Mrs. Devitt's. And there were various uncles and aunts and cousins, most of whom appeared to the beholder a bit dowdy. And finally there was the photograph on the oval table of Jack's father. It showed a handsome, agreeable countenance that stared out at you from a pair of smiling and reckless eyes. The upper part of an officer's tunic was in evidence, but even without that Dan would have surmised the soldier. There was something of Jack in the formation of the face, but it was doubtful if Jack would ever be as handsome as Captain Arthur Devitt.

Neither Jack nor his mother offered many details regarding the absent man, and at first Dan put that down to a reticence which he believed to

be peculiarly English. But later he wondered a little. Captain Devitt was so seldom, indeed almost never, mentioned in his presence. He gathered that Jack's father was engaged in some business that necessitated his absence from home for long periods, but what that business was he didn't learn. He did learn that Captain Devitt had served in the World War and had been rather seriously wounded, but for the rest the man remained a mystery to Dan, and, like most mysteries, whetted his curiosity.

There was not much time at their disposal, and their visit was brief. Hurrying out, they encountered Coach Hopkins on the porch. Although he was still in the white flannels and old blue sweater constituting his working attire, he was undeniably attractive, a fact which even Dan admitted, though a trifle grudgingly. He greeted them, and then, addressing Jack, said: 'Been calling on your mother, Devitt? I had the honor of meeting her this morning. I hope she is going to be comfortable here. Mrs. Thissel is sort of old-fashioned, but I've found her awfully obliging, so I hope your mother won't hesitate to — to go right after anything she wants. I'm pretty sure that Mrs. Thissel will be glad to do anything possible. Really, you know, she's rather a dear old soul; awfully amusing at times — I'd love to have you hear her tell about the time the late Mr. Thissel took her to the World's Fair in Chicago — but

good-hearted as you please. If there's anything I can do at any time to make your mother's visit pleasant, Devitt, I do hope she will let me. How did it go to-day, Dan?'

Consuming the flagstones of Center Street with enormous strides, Jack said presently: 'Nice of Coach to offer to help the mater, wasn't it?'

Dan shot a quick, sidelong glance at his companion, saw that Jack's countenance was apparently without guile, and, after a noncommittal grunt and a brief silence, answered a trifle morosely: 'Oh, sure! But I'll bet that if your mother was old and had wrinkles and wore a funny little shawl over her shoulders like Mrs. Thissel, he wouldn't even know she was in the house with him!'

'Oh, I say!' protested Jack. 'You *are* down on him, aren't you? I thought you said you didn't dislike Hopkins as — well, personally.'

'Huh!' said Dan.

By the end of his first week at Mount Collier, Jack had pretty well settled down into his groove. Dan had been of immense help in a social way, a fact appreciated both by Jack and his mother. Jack's list of acquaintances, which had started with Gregory Knight and Lester Wrenn, now numbered all the desirables in the Upper Middle Class — the undesirables Dan had carefully avoided — and a scattering of seniors and Lower Middle fellows. Since one sooner or later at

Mount Collier settled down to an affiliation with a certain fairly distinct element, or 'crowd' in school parlance, it was already evident that Jack would become a member of the 'football crowd,' which theoretically at least dominated student affairs, since it was largely composed of seniors who, whether they deserved it or not, were looked upon by the two lower classes as persons of heroic attainments and great wisdom. As a matter of cold fact the football crowd contained all sorts; or, at least, most sorts; 'pluggers,' or those who found no joys beyond the pages of their textbooks, were, of course, excepted. It was rather a numerous section of the student body, and of certain elements it was difficult to say whether they really belonged or, like outer stars of a constellation, merely swung about on the fringe. And, of course, there was overlapping. As, for instance, a number of them constituted a portion of the baseball crowd, equally well recognized if not quite so influential; and still others were affiliated with the small but extremely select coterie of 'snakes'; a 'snake' being a fellow who frequented social affairs in the town or went to dances in Springville, who professed to feel at ease in a dinner jacket, read and discussed the society news in the New York or Boston papers with his brother 'snakes,' and aimed at a sartorial perfection scorned by the common run of his fellows. Since many of the 'snakes' were fellows of means, it would not have

been surprising if within their circle there had sprung up an even more select sodality based on affluence. But Mount Collier had always prided itself on its democracy and it frowned heavily on any semblance of snobbery, with the result that no coterie of wealth had ever fully materialized.

There was, also, the 'Forum crowd,' made up of members of the School literary society and the Debating Club. Lester Wrenn, as well as several others of the football crowd, belonged there, too. The Forum crowd, by common consent, included a handful who were known as 'White Sisters.' These exalted youths met on Friday evenings in the study of Mr. White, instructor of Junior English, and read and discussed the poems of neglected poets, the works of Walter Pater, or, in the translation, the writings of Dante. Gregory Knight had, in his lower middle year, been a 'White Sister,' but, as he nowadays acknowledged, the strain had been too great. Dan overlapped in several directions, while owning chief allegiance to the football crowd, being a baseball player and one of the pillars of the Forum Society. All this has been set down to indicate how easy it was for Jack, having once been accepted by a number of his fellow gridiron addicts, to form acquaintances outside. In the course of time, although not yet, he made Forum, introduced by Dan and seconded by Lester Wrenn. Ultimately he became one of the baseball bunch; but that was along in Feb-

ruary. Meanwhile he daily enlarged his circle of acquaintances and friends, Dan looking on critically and acting as a sort of censor. When Jack came back to Number 37 to report having met So-and-So, Dan might approve or he might remain noncommittal or he might say: 'So-and-So, eh? Well, I wouldn't do much with him, Jack. He's rather a wet rag.' In the latter case Jack carefully avoided So-and-So thereafter, doing it so nicely, though, that no feelings were hurt. It was several days before it became known amongst his new friends that he owed allegiance to King George; and even then there were many who scoffed at the report. Two or three nicknames were tentatively applied to him; 'Johnny Bull' and 'Prince of Wales' among them; but none of them seemed to fit and so went by the board. Certainly he was totally unlike the popular conception of John Bull, while his nose at least would have prevented his being mistaken for the Prince. Fortunately, when the catalogue made its appearance toward the end of October, he was entered briefly as John Devitt and so he was spared being again called Cyril. When his entire title did become known it was too late. He remained just Jack.

CHAPTER V

'WHERE HAVE I SEEN YOU BEFORE?'

It was on the Thursday evening of his second week at School that he met Porter Graves for the first time. Of course he had seen Graves at the field several afternoons; had even on one occasion taken orders from him; but he had not yet been introduced. The meeting took place in Number 38 Upper, habitation of Gregory and Lester. Number 38 and Number 37 were almost directly across the corridor from each other, and when the occupants of both rooms were at home their doors stood wide; and if you didn't mind raising your voice a bit you could hold converse quite satisfactorily across the ten-foot strip of brown linoleum. Outside of study hours and the hours devoted to slumber, Dan and Jack spent almost as much time in Number 38 as in their own quarters, and the converse was equally true. This evening a crowd of seven had gathered in Number 38; the hosts, Dan and Jack, Jerry Dabney, Hal Laidlaw, and Porter Graves. The latter and Dabney arrived last. They were, 'Plug' Graves explained, on their way downstairs to play chess and could stay only a minute. Dan looked about considerably.

'Jack,' he said, 'you've met all these chaps, haven't you?'

'He hasn't met me,' laughed Graves, while Jack was still forming his reply. He pushed past Dabney and around the table to thrust a big hand over Greg's shoulder. 'Glad to know you, Devitt. Seen you at the field, of course.'

'How are you?' responded Jack, taking the hand and getting a painfully hearty shake. 'Awfully glad to meet you, too, Mr. Graves.'

Jack had no notion of rebuking Plug, but in effect he did so. At Mount Collier the use of the prefix 'Mister' on the occasion of an introduction was a sacred custom. No one, indeed, can be more formal than the preparatory school fellow when formality is indicated. While Plug Graves, who was big and affected a hearty, offhand manner, was frequently forgiven *gaucheries* that would have brought prompt challenge to another, his disregard of the conventions had not been approved of on this occasion, and pleased grins had appeared on several countenances following Jack's reply. Plug, however, pretended to have missed the point, although a close inspection of his face at the moment would have revealed a slight tightening of the lips.

'Wish you'd tell me one thing, though,' he went on. 'Where have I seen you before?'

Dan, watching his chum, saw Jack's eyes flicker, but all the latter said was, 'You're not from East Ogden, New Jersey, by any chance?'

'Great gosh, no!' exclaimed Plug. 'Never was there in my life. Just the same, Devitt, I'll swear I've seen you somewhere!'

Dan thought to himself: 'Jack's met him before, didn't like him, and is trying to squeeze out of it.' But then, when Plug, with a puzzled laugh, added, 'But it'll come to me. I've got a great little memory for faces!' Dan wasn't so sure, for he would have sworn that Jack, under his polite smile, looked distinctly uneasy. What Jack said was, 'Of course you may be right, but I rather fancy you're mistaken, Graves. I haven't been about much.'

'I don't believe I'm mistaken,' replied Plug stubbornly as he sat down, still looking hard at the other. 'No, sir, I've certainly run across you somewhere, and when I remember the place I'll have it. Ever try that?' he asked of the room at large. 'When you're puzzled by a likeness, you know, you try to associate it with different places you've been. Wonderful the way the two things will hitch up. I've tried placing Devitt in New Rochelle, and it doesn't work. It wasn't there then. All right. Now, let's see, last summer I was at a hotel at Salmon Lake — it wasn't there either. Then, early this month I visited in Philadelphia.' He frowned intently across at Jack.

'I've never been in Philadelphia,' said Jack; and Dan thought he detected a note of relief in the voice.

'No, it wasn't there, I guess,' agreed Plug. 'Then where the deuce ——'

'Listen,' interposed Dan, 'this may mean a lot to you, Plug, but personally I'm bored stiff. Besides, Jack looks like a couple of thousand other guys, and it's a dollar to a plugged dime you never laid eyes on him before last week.'

'Is that so?' began Plug sarcastically.

But Jerry Dabney switched away from trouble with: 'Say, Plug, what's this about using the huddle? Dan says Gene's going to spring it Saturday.'

'Sure. He's going to spring it before then. We'll try it in practice to-morrow. Why not? It's the only sensible way of giving signals. That old stuff of yelling the dope out loud and letting the other fellow in on your play is out, feller.'

'Always seemed sort of babyish to me,' muttered Greg. 'Like a lot of kids whispering a secret in a fence corner. You know.'

'I don't see that,' objected Manager Laidlaw. 'As Plug says, the old way isn't being used any more. With the huddle you lessen the chance of getting the signal wrong ——'

'Yes,' Jerry broke in, 'and every guy has a chance to put in his oar. Besides, there are heaps of schools; colleges, too; still doing without it and getting along nicely. One of 'em's Lawrence.'

'Lawrence didn't huddle last year,' owned Plug, 'but that doesn't mean she won't this.'

'Mean she's going to?' insisted Jerry.

Plug shrugged. 'She will if she wants to keep up with the modern game.'

'Hang the "modern" game,' grunted Dan. 'It was too much "modern" game that beat us last fall.'

'Well, it wasn't exactly that,' said Jerry. 'What ailed us ——'

'There's a good deal of difference,' interrupted Hal Laidlaw, 'between being modern and being — well, crazy. Now ——'

'Which were we?' asked Dan.

'What Hal means, I suppose,' said Lester Wrenn, 'is that it's all right to go in for new stuff if you don't overdo it. I know' — he shifted uncomfortably — 'that some fellows thought Gene tried too many new stunts last year, but I don't think it was that that beat us. There were other things. When it came to the show-down, after a pretty fair run of playing, we slumped about fifty per cent. We tried to get through the Lawrence game on about six plays, and most of them mouldy with age, with the result that once Lawrence got hep to 'em we didn't have a chance. It certainly wasn't new stuff we tried that day! Not so you'd notice it!'

'No, but it was learning new stuff that took up so much practice time that we didn't learn to hold the ball when we had it,' answered Dan sharply. 'What's the good of putting in period after period of drilling new plays when, after you've learned

them, they're not fit to use and you have to scrap the lot?'

'That was Bob Weeks's fault,' declared Plug. 'He had the plays and wouldn't use 'em.'

'All right, but why didn't Pebble use them when he took over in the third? He knew as much about them as Bob, didn't he? No, sir, the reason we didn't try the "modern" stuff against Lawrence was simply because Gene got cold feet at the last. He knew plaguy well the silly stunts wouldn't eat ground and he had the sense to let 'em alone. There weren't more than two plays out of the six or eight he taught us last fall that were good enough to gain an inch from a team of blind orphans!'

'You're crazy!' declared Plug hotly.

'He's blamed right,' said Greg. 'Why, hang it, Plug, some of those plays Gene drilled into us used to get me all dizzy, like walking around in a circle. There was one — what was it he called it? 'Full-back Fake on Long Side,' wasn't it? Well, anyway, after that play got started I used to meet myself coming around an end! It looked pretty on paper; they all did; but you got all worn out by the time you reached the line, and if the other team gave you as much as a hard look you stopped and handed 'em the ball. I'm no reactionist in football ——'

'Hear! Hear!' applauded Lester, *sotto voce*.

'But I'm no futurist, either. Give me a play

that's got some good old-fashioned wham in it, and I'll make a dent or know why, but when it comes to taking three steps to the left, counting two, turning around, counting three, running to the right, counting four, throwing a ball I haven't got and then putting out an end or a tackle, who, naturally, thinks I'm dippy from the way I've been acting — why, I'm a total loss at it, fellows! Sure, new plays are fine — if they get anywhere.'

'There aren't any new plays, anyway ——'

'Just a minute, Dan!' Hal spoke earnestly. 'Those plays did look all right on paper, Greg, and they were all right on the field, too, and Gene could have made them go against about any team except Lawrence. But when we showed him, right at the start, that we couldn't get off our toes until the Lawrence line was on top of us, what was the use? Backs can't go through holes that aren't there! Those plays, or most of them, were planned for a quick-charging line, and our line was as slow as mud. And, when it comes to that, the backs weren't much faster. You can scowl all over your face, Plug, but it's the truth and you know it! So Gene did the sensible thing and scrapped the plays.'

'Looked to me like it was Bob Weeks,' said Dan dryly. 'I don't remember that Gene sent any orders out until well into the middle of the second period.'

Hal winced, but didn't back down. 'Bob quit

them early, yes, but Gene could have kept him at them if he hadn't seen that they weren't going to deliver the goods against a team that played as fast as Lawrence was playing.'

'Thought you said it was because we were slow,' objected Gregory.

'We were slow and they were fast; mighty fast; and ——'

'All right,' interrupted Dan, 'but why were we slow? Because jump was one of the two hundred and ninety-nine things Gene didn't have time to drill into us. Like holding onto the ball, and watching it instead of looking at the scenery, and getting under those guys instead of trying to play leap-frog with 'em. I wasn't any better than the rest; may have been worse; but I know blame well I could have played good football if some one had hammered it into me last fall. Instead of that I ——'

'Oh, shut up!' pleaded Jerry Dabney. 'What's the good of all the *post mortem* stuff? Question is, what's going to happen this year? What sort of a team is Lawrence going to have, Plug?'

'Good, mighty good. She's got six veterans to start off with and a bunch of fine second-string material. We've got to hump ourselves to beat her. That's why it simply won't do to crab and go on like a lot of silly goats about what happened last year. It doesn't get us anywhere to criticize Gene Hopkins. Dan has a grouch against Gene

and can't see anything good in him at all. To hear him talk ——'

'No one's given me a chance,' muttered Dan plaintively.

'To hear him talk you'd think Gene didn't want to win as much as any of us. Well, by golly, he does. Say, don't you know it's bread and butter to him? How's he going to get a new contract if he doesn't deliver the goods? So, for Mike's sake, forget what happened last year and pull together. Get into the game, you fellows, and fight instead of whining!'

'Oh, we'll fight,' said Greg. 'Just the same, there were a lot of things wrong last fall, Plug, and I, for one, would like to think that Gene knows a bit more now than he did then about getting a team ready for Lawrence. What I hear is that he's back with a whole new supply of these tricky plays. How about it?'

'Yes, he's got some new plays, of course,' answered Plug defiantly. 'Why not? He studied football coaching for three or four weeks when he might have been having a good time ——'

'Who says he didn't?' inquired Lester, grinning. 'Mean to tell me when a hundred or so football coaches get together they just sit around and twiddle their thumbs and look miserable? Not on your life! I'll bet they had a whale of a time. I'd like to have been there!'

'All right,' agreed Plug impatiently. 'He did

it, anyway. And those fellows naturally swapped yarns and discussed plays, and Gene was foxy enough to pick out some good stuff. Kept his ears open, he did. Sure, he's got some new plays, and I've seen 'em and some of them are sure-fire.'

'And I've got to learn them,' moaned Gregory. 'Oh, my sainted aunt! Say, Plug, you're pretty thick with Gene. Just tell him I can't do the new-fangled dances, will you? Ask him to stick to the dear old waltz, where I grab the capsule and whang straight into the line, without counting four or shaking hands with any one on the way. Ask him to post those nice tricky stunts on the board in Gym where we can all see and admire 'em and then teach us the good old stuff that wins football games. Will you do that?'

'Oh, shut up!' retorted Plug peevishly. 'I'm telling you these plays are the real stuff, plays that have been tried and proven. Why, there's one there that Rockne gave him himself!'

'How come?' asked Lester mildly. 'Was it spoiled?'

'There aren't any new plays,' stated Dan a second time. 'What they call new plays are just plays that were used twenty years ago and then forgotten. Look at the stuff Penn sprung last year and got away with. "New," said the papers. New, my eye! Harvard used it when Percy Haughton first took hold there. Same way with all the wonderful "new" plays. Show me one

that hasn't been used already, anywhere from one to thirty years ago, and I'll present you with a leather-bound, gilt-edged copy of the Rules Book!'

'Say, you know a lot about football, don't you?' exclaimed Plug. 'Yes, you do not! Listen, Simple, Gene's got plays there you never dreamed of. I don't mean they haven't been used; of course they have, lots of times; but they're new around here. They're big college stuff, and they're wows! You just hold your horses and wait till you see 'em. Yes, and keep your mouth shut, too. You've been slamming Gene ever since he kept you out of the "Aggie" game last fall, and I'm tired of hearing you.'

Jack, listening in silence to the talk, expected Dan to become angry and retort in kind, but Dan only grinned and shook his head gently.

Plug glared a moment and then swiftly recovered his temper. 'Honest, you guys, there's just one way to get a good team together and that's to — to bury animosities and work like the dickens. That right, Hal?'

'Yes, it is. Of course Dan doesn't mean more than half he says, but some of the new chaps don't know it, and it doesn't do any good to let them get the — the impression that the coach doesn't know his business.'

'All right,' said Dan gently. 'I'll let them find it out for themselves.'

'That's a putrid thing to say!' flared Plug. 'If you feel that way, why don't you get out?'

'Oh, shut up, Plug!' replied Dan patiently. 'Speech is free. I don't make any criticisms of Hopkins behind his back I'm not perfectly willing to make to his face. He knows it, too. As for you, Plug, you want to take a tumble to yourself. You just can't talk yourself into Fred Way's job, and that's all there is to it.'

Greg grinned, and one or two others looked as if they'd like to, but Plug took it badly. 'You talk that way to me much and I'll smash you, Clinton! I don't want Fred's job. I wouldn't be captain if I could. You keep your dirty mouth shut if you don't want trouble!' Plug jumped to his feet, thrust his chair aside, and stared invitingly across the room. But Hal said, 'Oh, forget it, Plug!' and Jerry arose, too, stretching, and yawned, 'Well, I'm off, fellows,' and, since Dan made no answer to the challenge, the party broke up peacefully. Plug went grumpily off with Jerry for that delayed chess game, Hal took his departure looking rather disapproving, and, after a few minutes, Dan and Jack went back to Number 37.

Somewhat later that evening Dan remarked casually, 'Plug Graves seemed awfully certain about having seen you before, didn't he?'

Jack nodded without looking up from his book. 'Got me mixed with some one else, I dare say,' he answered carelessly.

'Must have,' agreed Dan. 'Funny he was so insistent, though.' He watched Jack sharply without appearing to, but Jack didn't look his way. Nor did he answer.

CHAPTER VI

JACK REVERSES HIS FIELD

COACH HOPKINS made up a team on Friday and let them rub up against the substitutes for half an hour. Nothing startling developed. The substitutes were no match for the first, and Captain Way's eleven did about as they pleased. The coach gave more attention to the substitutes than to their opponents and tried very hard to make them exhibit a semblance of defense. But his efforts weren't much use, for the line crumpled and gaped and the first team backs romped through to their hearts' content. The coach used every available occupant of the bench, and in consequence Jack got into a scrimmage for the first time. He did well enough, but the whole substitute team was bewildered and headless, and none of his mates played other than a lone hand. Jack took some bruises, all to little purpose, intercepted a short pass — which led to nothing, since the ball was promptly fumbled — and made one punt. Opportunity for the latter arrived when the coach, weary, perhaps, of first team touchdowns, took the pigskin away from the attackers and gave it to the substitutes. Jack surprised the enemy safety men by kicking over their heads and then went down the field so fast that he

almost overtook his ends. But Jerry Dabney came speeding back with the ball, eluded the enemy, and got back half of the lost ground. Jack wanted very, very much to try a tackle on Jerry, but a watchful interference bowled him over. Mr. Hopkins tried out the huddle with fair success, although there was no doubt in any one's mind that it slowed the game up.

The next afternoon Peterboro High School arrived on the scene and Mount Collier started the season's schedule with a victory. Not, though, that anything less than a victory was looked for, since Peterboro High was no great shakes as an exponent of football. She did have the material, but it wasn't welded together, and had the home team faced her two weeks, or even a week, later, the score would have been much more one-sided than it was. Against a better adversary than Mount Collier proved that afternoon Peterboro would have been pretty helpless, but, as it was, she managed to make first down five times and, astoundingly scored a clean touchdown and added a point for good measure. Peterboro gave the small audience many good laughs, for it was no uncommon thing to see the runner go one way while the entire interference went another, or for the backs to gather about the quarter and protest passionately against a signal. When that happened, the signal was either changed or there ensued a prolonged delay while the play was care-

fully explained to them and an amused official alternately frowned at his watch and grinned at a brother official. Peterboro fumbled on an average of once in every three plays, and a more alert eleven than Mount Collier could boast on this occasion would have profited vastly. But the home team was still no more than launched, and all such opportunities save one were wasted. Oddly, that one was worse than wasted as it turned out, for although Chaldron, a Mount Collier tackle, sifted through, gathered up the pigskin and made off with it, he, in turn, dropped the ball when tackled from behind by a frantic Peterboro end and a second brown-stockinged youth sprang on it and did a Marathon to the home team's goal line, miraculously eluding or tearing loose from fully half the Mount Collier aggregation. A minute or so later, with a sagacity previously lacking, Peterboro, certain that a try-for-point by the ordinary method would be blocked, faked a kick and sent a back around the end.

This incident occurred late in the first period and tied the adversaries at 7 to 7, giving the local rooters something to think about. But after that, almost before the second quarter was well under way, the home team took the ball in mid-field and Plug Graves, alternating with Greg Knight, smashed and fought to a second score. The kick went awry and the figures were 13 to 7.

Mount Collier almost scored once more in the

half, but Weeks messed a pass from center and before the Blue-and-Russet could get a paltry four yards the whistle blew. Coach Hopkins began to sprinkle his team with substitutes about halfway through the third quarter, although he was discreet in the matter. Jack didn't see service until the fourth period began. Then he and four others were trotted on in a bunch, and with their arrival the blue-legged crowd looked a whole lot like yesterday's substitute team. However, there remained a leavening of older heads and, although the home team was still only one score to the good, it was felt that the situation was yet well under control.

Jack had Nick Arnould and 'Pop' Somers for back-field mates, with 'Pebble' Stone at quarter. Both Graves and Knight had done their share and been relieved. Peterboro had the ball when the last session started and she held on to it for some time afterwards, making a gallant march to within twenty-six yards of the enemy goal before, lacking the ability to make a forward pass good, she tried a desperate placement kick and missed widely. Mount Collier came back to the twenty yards and began a march that reached mid-field in seven plays. Since, however, the periods to-day were but ten minutes long, the final whistle was impending by the time Storey, left end, struck the sod just past the fifty with the ball snuggled under him and three Peterboro youths closely attached

to him. Quarterback Stone scowled intently if hurriedly. It was unthinkable that the Blue-and-Russet should be held to a paltry two scores by a team who even yet, with somewhere about a minute remaining, couldn't take their signals without going into conference! He weighed the chances of a long forward. Peterboro was set for just such an event, her backs deep and her ends and tackles loose. Perhaps a short heave would pull a gain; he thought it would; but he wasn't seeking three yards or five or even ten; what he craved was a whole bunch of territory. He could still plug Arnould or Somers at the center or Somers or Devitt at tackles, inside or out, and be sure of a short gain, but there wasn't time to gnaw off that remaining distance; it had to be gulped in big bites, the fewer the better. By the time he went to the huddle, Pebble's mind was made up. He would take the ball himself.

He very nearly got away with it, too. There was a wide hole beyond guard on the right, and he had hidden the ball very cleverly. He shot through without touching, and, with the backs hurrying in rather vaguely, had wonderful hopes. But an overzealous tackle, seeking to provide interference, was his undoing. He swung in ahead of Pebble, blocking him for an instant, and the consequent slowing up on the runner's part led to disaster. A pair of brown arms appeared from nowhere, as it seemed to Pebble, and clung tena-

ciously to his left knee. Pebble went on for another two yards, brown arms and all, but then he was smothered. Quite a number of the enemy managed to take part in the suppression of the quarterback, and when Landreth pulled him to his feet he was in no condition to plan strategy. He was very unsteady on his legs and his head was spinning and he was still 'puffing on one cylinder,' as he afterwards put it. But there wasn't time for dawdling. He reeled back, his panting companions leaned about him, and a play was called. As a matter of fact, it was the first thing that Pebble's wandering mind thought of, and it was doomed to failure from the start, or should have been. Pen Stoulson, acting captain, started to challenge, but on second thought closed his mouth again. After all, what did it matter? Forty seconds had already been announced, and what happened or didn't happen in forty seconds couldn't matter a mite. So Mount Collier, being largely substitute and as yet unwearied and full of energy and enthusiasm, hustled into line and events started to transpire.

A third-string center delivered a phenomenally straight and true pass to Jack Devitt, Number 3 Back, and Jack clasped the ball to him almost passionately and began a sprint toward the side of the field. Peterboro had showed a fair defense against wide runs and it didn't take her long to diagnose the present play and get busy. Jack was

supposed to have three interferers between him and the enemy for the first stage of his expedition, but one of the three had started off in the wrong direction and he was left with two. And since one of the two made the mistake of meeting a Peterboro half-back instead of avoiding him, Jack very suddenly had just one lone comrade. The latter did the best he could, but the enemy were many and insistent and he couldn't be everywhere at once. Jack saw this as well as he did and anticipated what was to happen an instant later. His comrade went down very completely.

Jack realized that if he kept on in his present direction one of two things was bound to happen. Either some one would tackle him or he would run out of bounds. Neither eventuality aroused any enthusiasm. There seemed but one sensible thing to do, and so, swinging suddenly on his heel, he ran the other way. Of course, he reflected — if one may be said to reflect at such a time and under such circumstances — he was merely prolonging the agony, for so far he wasn't a yard nearer the enemy goal than he had been when he had started and just as many brown-legged opponents were between him and said goal as ever. But, although the foxes had doubled back, the hound had a slight start. The field was a most confused scene now, for friend and enemy were disconcertingly mixed together. Jack made up his mind to view every one with suspicion; trying to determine aid

from hindrance was too much of a task. Yet aid there was, for he presently found two youths running at his left, bowling over other youths as they ran, and for a moment he suited his pace to theirs. But they melted from sight and he was on his own again.

Now, however, he had, it appeared, won through the more congested area, for only an occasional figure remained within his view. He was getting rather tired, but he was encouraged by the fact that the enemy goal posts were very much nearer than they had been. Evidently he was at last doing better than merely holding his own. He had no distinct memory of having ceased running back and forth across the field and started toward the end, but it was probably a fact that he had done so. Perhaps he had 'turned in' when those two fellows had formed interference. He continued to traverse the sod, aware of much noise and confusion, conscious of footsteps behind him and of threatening trouble ahead. But his head was quite clear now and he was able to pit his wits against those of the Peterboro quarter-back. The pursuit worried him far less, for he was going at top-speed and his top-speed was, he believed, better than any of the enemies'. The brown-stockinged youth who bore down on him from the left came cautiously. He looked very desperate, very determined, but he looked anxious, too. Jack swung a little when he was a half-dozen



JACK CHANGED PACE AND DIRECTION
SIMULTANEOUSLY

strides away as if to meet him, and saw the other's eyes widen. The feint momentarily confused him. Jack's pace slowed a little. Behind him an over-anxious pursuer left his feet in an awkward and hopeless effort to reach the runner. His groping hands barely flicked Jack's legs. Jack changed pace and direction simultaneously. He shot off to the right like a startled hare. The quarter swung desperately to avoid the rolling tackler, leaped across him as a last resort, and found himself a stride behind the runner who was now miraculously between him and the goal line!

Jack dug then. There was only another white streak to be crossed before he could tumble over and get a full breath, and the realization helped. He led the field all the way, although there were never more than two yards between him and the nearest pursuer, and went across midway between corner and right-hand post, thereby at considerable expense of exertion and time adding another score to Mount Collier's sum. Slightly later, to his own surprise and that of the audience, Somers kicked the ball over for another point. Then, since the quarter had ended while Jack was still ambling about the gridiron, the opposing teams cheered each other huskily, and the spectators, still reflecting the pleasure derived by them from that final touchdown, wandered back toward the dormitories.

Jack was thumped about a good deal by those

who had played with him in the last quarter and received words of commendation from some who hadn't, and in the shower room Coach Hopkins shook hands with him jovially and said quite nice things. He declared that Jack had initiative, and appeared very much pleased about it. Jack again wondered why Dan was so down on the coach.

To Dan, when they were going back from the gymnasium together, Jack said apologetically: 'Of course that was just rot. I mean to say there wasn't any initiative about it, Dan. I simply saw that I'd be stopped if I kept on the way I was going; either that or run out of bounds; and so I turned around and went the other way. That was — well, instinctive, and ——'

'Maybe,' said Dan gravely, 'Gene meant to say you had instinct. The words are somewhat alike.'

'Well, maybe — oh, shut up! Instinct! That's what animals have! What I'm getting at is this. Did he really think — or does he really think, I mean, that I — well, planned it? Because if he does he's probably going to get an awful jolt some day when he looks for more of the same and I don't show it. Because, you see, Dan, I've not a bit of initiative!'

Dan grinned. 'You should worry, Jack. It's like this. Gene thinks you've got it and what Gene thinks must be so. Consequently you've got initiative. Anyway, he will look for it and, being an awfully hopeful guy, he will find it. Yes, sir,

Jack, you'll be considered a master of initiative after this by at least one person around here. What did he say about side-stepping that Peterboro safety man?'

'Why, nothing. He didn't mention that.'

Dan grunted. 'Of course not. He wouldn't. That's the one clever thing you did. The rest of the time you just ran about like a scared cat, looking for a tree to climb. Oh, well, you did *run*; I'll say that for you. Look here, where'd you learn to use your legs like that?'

'I could always run pretty well. And then, at high school, as I told you, I tried for the track team awhile.'

'I'd forgotten,' murmured Dan, and went into the silence. But going upstairs he said, 'Guess you were right to hold out for a back position, old man, but I'm going to tell you plainly that you haven't got much chance to make the team, so don't set your heart on it.'

'You mean on account of Graves and Dabney?'

'And Gene Hopkins, yes.'

'But Gene spoke to-day as though he — well, as though he thought rather well of my playing, Dan.'

'Why not? You'll find that you're quite a hero after to-day. Reversing your field and getting away with it and then fooling the opposing safety man is always spectacular, and fellows like spectacular stunts. And the players who perform

them. You don't think Gene's going to stand outside the crowd, do you? Not he! It doesn't cost him a thing to tell you how good you are, Jack, but try to horn into that sacred back-field of his and see how far you'll get! Oh, he's going to be glad to use you as a substitute after to-day, and you'll be pretty certain of getting plenty of playing and copping your letters later on, but don't begin to feel sorry for Plug or Jerry Dabney.'

'Oh, well, that's all right,' murmured Jack. 'If he gives me a job of playing now and then I'll be satisfied.'

'That's what you think now,' Dan said. 'Anyway, don't say I didn't do what I could to save you from a broken heart.'

'I won't,' laughed Jack. And in the room he added: 'Anyhow, Dan, I'll never be the player that either of those fellows is. Not this year, anyway.'

Dan turned a curious gaze upon him. 'Do you really think that?' he asked.

'Why, certainly.'

'Modest youth,' Dan muttered. 'Well, it's a helpful thought, Jack. Hold it.'

Dan's prediction, a not very hazardous one to make, was speedily proved true. Mount Collier acclaimed Jack a football hero. Of course the School didn't say it in just those words, nor anywhere near so briefly, but it amounted to that. It was freely predicted that at last Plug Graves

would have to hump himself to keep his position, although a few personal friends and admirers of the right half-back ridiculed the idea. Rather oddly, Jack was not considered seriously as a rival to Jerry Dabney, although he and Jerry were much the same type of players. It was somewhat as though the school secretly welcomed a contender for Graves's position; as though it felt that Plug had remained unchallenged too long. Probably the fact that he was not popular, especially amongst the two lower classes, was the explanation. Jack bore his honors modestly, and in that was aided by Coach Hopkins. The coach continued to regard him with open approval and to hail him in a jovially intimate manner reserved for the elect among his charges, but Jack continued to occupy the bench a good deal more than half the time when scrimmage was going forward. Dan smiled ironically and inquired, 'What price glory?'

The following Saturday the team traveled down the river to engage Springville High and returned with a 13 to 0 victory as a result of much better playing. Jack saw action again for parts of the second and third periods, but failed to distinguish himself. It is but fair to add, though, that few if any opportunities came his way. Bob Weeks was at quarter, and Bob didn't seem quite so well aware of his presence behind him as he was of that of the other two backs. Jack said some-

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thing to that effect, quite without rancor, to Dan that evening, and Dan, after an instant of contemplative examination of his finger nails, nodded and cryptically remarked, 'Huh!'

CHAPTER VII

UP MOUNT COLLIER

EVER since his first sight of Mount Collier, Jack had wanted to make its ascent. So far the opportunity hadn't arrived; or, more exactly, opportunity and companionship had failed to coincide. He was fond of walking, but he preferred to have some one along, and although Dan had readily consented to make the climb some day the particular day hadn't arrived. On the Sunday following the Springville game, however, Jack persuaded the other to keep his promise, and after dinner they started out, Dan regretting, as he led the way around the farther corner of Lower House and toward the stables, that he had eaten so much.

'If you'd only told me beforehand, Jack,' he said gloomily, 'I'd have cut out that second serving of pudding. Pedestrianism is a thing that shouldn't be undertaken lightly ——'

'You just suggested that it should.'

'I mean in a spirit of lightness, not without proper preparation,' corrected the other with dignity. 'Heretofore when I have climbed Collier I've gone about it properly. I've prepared for it. A very little to eat, perhaps a couple of raw eggs and a piece of toast, an hour's rest afterwards and

then I'm set. But to start out to scale mountains on soup and roast beef and mashed potatoes and — oh, well, it just isn't done.'

'Scale mountains!' scoffed Jack as they emerged from the school property on Hill Street. 'To hear you one would think we were going to make an ascent of the Jungfrau or the Matterhorn!'

'One,' answered Dan patiently, 'wouldn't speak so snippily if one knew that one was about to climb one mile and one half, one wouldn't.'

Jack grinned. 'One for you! But, joking aside, it doesn't look very far or very steep. Is it?'

'Did you ever climb a barn roof?' asked Dan. 'The road's good most of the way, but it's too blame long. You go around this side for about a half-mile and then you take a path that brings you out on the road again on the other side. Then you keep on the road for about a quarter of a mile and then you take another path; School Trail, it's called; some of the fellows made it six or eight years ago; and that brings you to the top — if you don't fall off the mountain first! Oh, I do wish I hadn't eaten that last lump of pudding!'

The street rapidly degenerated into a country road as they left the School behind. On the left a couple of down-at-the-heel farms occupied the terrain between them and the first slope of the hill, one property running upward into the clearing amidst the trees that Jack had noted before.

As they approached the mountain it began to take on height, and presently a second but lesser peak appeared behind the first. 'Holly Mountain,' said Dan, nodding at it. 'There's a fine old ravine between the two summits; just as if some one had made two whacks with an axe and lifted out a wedge. A fellow named Poretfield got lost in there one time, and the whole School had to turn out and hunt for him. They found him after he'd spent a night in there, and he was one of the scarest-looking guys you ever saw. Here's where we hit the trail. We save a couple of hundred yards if we strike in here. The road begins farther along.'

They climbed a wall and struck along a well-defined footpath that ascended the upland meadow leisurely between clumps of mountain sumac and hazel and an occasional gray birch. When they stepped out on the road, Jack was surprised to find that it was well-made and quite wide, its surface as smooth as a boulevard. 'State looks after it,' said Dan. 'This is some sort of reservation. Take a look behind.'

Jack did so. Already the School was well below them, confusedly out of proper location, it seemed, while the town looked like a park rather than a village, so thoroughly were the white dwellings hidden by the many trees. Farther, a stretch of blue water showed where the river curved westward beyond the common. Presently there was a

spring beside the road, with a concrete basin beneath, and, since the afternoon was fairly warm, they paused and drank, holding their mouths under the lip of the rusty iron pipe that brought the cold water over the edge of a granite ledge. Of course they both got rather wet during the proceeding. Dan said: 'Don't drink too much now. There's another spring farther on. By the way, I suppose you didn't think to bring any edelweiss along?' Jack regretfully, if suspiciously, acknowledged that he hadn't. 'Too bad. I always like a little to chew on when I do any climbing. It's very strengthening and sustaining. It's what they feed the Swiss cows on, you know. A Swiss cow can make a breakfast of edelweiss and walk right up the face of a mountain. The guides use it, too. It lends them a sort of — of elasticity. Give a Swiss guide a good nibble of edelweiss and he acts just like a goat. Goes bounding up the *crevasses* and *cols* and leaps from crag to crag. Wonderful!'

'Must be. Do you fancy some rubber gum would do as well?'

'I don't believe so. Of course in the Italian Alps the guides use garlic instead. It makes 'em quite as strong, I understand, but not so agile.'

Jack nodded soberly. 'The time I made the ascent of Mount Everest,' he said, 'I used yeast. Always had a cake with me and nibbled it every little while. Had rather tough luck, though, as it happened. Perhaps you read in the papers how I

got almost to the summit and had to turn back. They said it was because of the cold and the rarefied air, but it wasn't. What really happened was that I ran out of yeast. I'm quite certain that one more cake would have taken me to the top, Dan.'

'H'm,' said Dan. 'Well, I dare say you're right. Several of our prosperous citizens owe their rise in life to yeast. Now if you don't mind chucking the drivel, we'll switch off on this cute little path.'

'Looks to me,' remarked Jack dubiously, 'as if it had been made by some of those elastic goats you were telling about.'

'Well it isn't so bad if you watch your step. A bit steep later on, but folks almost never get killed. I believe the average isn't more than one a week.'

'Do you happen to know,' inquired Jack anxiously as he followed the other, 'whether this week's victim is accounted for? Because, if he isn't, there are some perfectly lovely chunks of rock handy and I'd be awfully pleased to make up the deficiency!'

'He is,' answered the other promptly. 'In fact, there were two fell over this week and the average's a bit disarranged. Sharp right, old son, and watch your step.'

Of course, reflected Jack, there wasn't any real danger, for, while the path was breath-takenly

steep, the hill descended not at all steeply and was well grown with low bushes. Below them the road went from sight around a corner of the mountain. Above them the trees, which had been sparse below, began to close in. Here and there earth had slid from the face of the canted ledges, leaving gray scars amidst the greenery. After a ten-minute climb they reached the road once more and paused there to get breath, sitting on the low wall that curved along the outer edge. The view now was wide and beautiful, although they were no more than halfway to the summit. Around a shoulder of the mountain the village of Adams, some five miles distant, nestled in the narrow valley, a huddle of small white houses and a long red factory, with the trees closing down on it from each side and the river cutting through it like a blue tape. Jack asked about the possibility of finding trout in the stream and Dan was pessimistic.

‘There are a few shiners, but I don’t believe you’d find any trout. You see, there are factories all along the river, Jack, and factories and trout don’t get on very well together. I’ll bet there was wonderful fishing around here a hundred years ago. You see some perfectly corking streams and holes that ought to be full of trout and aren’t. It’s a shame that factories can’t be satisfied with getting power from the rivers without dumping their waste into them and poisoning them.’

'I wouldn't think they'd get much power from that little brook,' said Jack.

'They do, though. And it isn't always a little brook, son. You ought to see the old boy in March or April. You wouldn't know him. He gets all wrought up and thinks he's a regular Mississippi! Well, we'd better get going again, I suppose. Supper's the same time on Sunday as on any other day. I wonder what they put in that pudding?'

'What I want to know is how you came to have a second. I had an idea that football fellows were supposed to go easy on pudding and that sort of stuff. Of course, I know you don't really train here ——'

'Like fun we don't train! Where'd you get that notion?'

'Well, you don't have tables.'

'No, we eat off the floor.'

'Shut up! You know what I mean. Training tables. We all sit around anywhere and eat what we please and ——'

'Yes, dearie, but that's the joke. You eat what you please and the first thing you know you're off the squad. Do you for one agonizing moment think I'd have eaten two helpings of that cursed pudding, as innocent as it looked, if this had been a practice day? Not on your life! No, son, if you want to keep fit and hold your job you'll use the old bean and eat what you're supposed to and not much else.'

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'But how do I know what I'm supposed to eat?' asked Jack. 'No one's said a word to me about diet since I came here.'

'Well, they will. Meanwhile you're presumed to have common sense and to have learned something about what's good for you and what isn't. Gene doesn't believe in raw beef and eggs and all that, and I think he's right, but he expects you to know what you can digest decently, and act accordingly. What's one fellow's meat is another fellow's ptomaine, and so we're allowed a lot of latitude.'

'I'd suppose that too much latitude would be bad for a football man,' mused Jack. 'Where I come from we try to keep them fairly svelte.'

Dan glared dangerously. 'You get off anything else like that and I'll take you back to School. These high latitudes — I mean altitudes are bad for you. Feel light-headed, do you?'

'Not very,' laughed Jack, 'but I certainly feel heavy-footed. Are we anywhere near the top?' He tried to determine the truth for himself, but, crane his head as he might, only ascending trees met his gaze. 'How much farther is it, Dan?'

'Not far. We're close to the School Trail now. How's that for a view? See the School? And the dear old dormitory? And Tumps marking my math paper by yon open window? What is it he writes?' Dan shaded his eyes and peered downward to where the school buildings showed their

bluish-gray roofs amidst the maples. 'Is it not a 96, Jack?'

'No, I'm afraid not. You're looking at it upside-down, Dan, old dear. It's a 69.'

Dan chuckled. 'At that I'd be fairly well pleased. Tumps sure socked it to us Friday!'

Jack agreed, but added rather dismally: 'It's French that's getting my goat, though. I'm absolutely lost at that. You see, at high school we just sort of dabbled in it, but here — my word, Dan, Sawyer hasn't any heart!'

'I've always had the theory about Togs,' said Dan, 'that he ate a lot of French pastry when a kid and it didn't agree with him. Sort of stuck in his system. He reminds me of a man trying to make some one else suffer for his own youthful indiscretions. Personally, I stand him pretty well because I had a lot of French when I was a kid. My folks were great on running over to Paris and Aix and I had French nurses galore. Of course, I never learned decent French, but I know enough to bluff. Only trouble is, Togs is so blamed particular about grammar. I could do real well if it wasn't for the grammar!'

They came a moment later to a rude sign inscribed 'Mount Collier Academy Trail, 1920.' Beside it the beginning of a path led upwards through the trees at what Jack termed a criminal slant. They tripped over roots and slipped on dead leaves for a way, clinging to branches or

projecting rocks the while, and then found themselves at last above the forest. The trees were replaced by twisted oaks scarcely head high and low-growing shrubs. The grass was sparse and dry and the slope ahead of them, over which the trail climbed steeply back and forth, showed increasing patches of bare ledge. There was a steady breeze blowing up here and Jack, removing his cap, would have stopped to cool off. But Dan bade him come on. 'The spring's just ahead,' he explained, 'and there's a bench there; or used to be; I haven't been up here since year before last.'

They zigzagged on for a minute or two, and then, under the lee of a jagged, up-thrust rock, found the bench. But, although several rusted cans lay about, the spring was as dry as their tongues.

Dan observed it contemptuously and kicked at a can. 'What kind of a spring do you call yourself?' he demanded.

'Maybe it doesn't work on Sundays,' suggested Jack, sitting down on the unsteady, knife-hacked bench. 'Or maybe you have to drop a nickel somewhere. Have you a nickel, Dan?'

'I've got a thirst,' was the reply, 'and it's a dandy!' He applied a finger to the faint streak of moisture that led out of the rock, applied it to his tongue and scowled. 'I suppose there hasn't been rain enough lately,' he said. 'Oh, well, we'll have a drink when we get back to the other place.'

He sat down beside Jack. 'I carved my initials here once. Let's see if I can find them. They must be under you.'

Jack arose with a groan, and they were. Dan traced them proudly. "'D. H. C.,'" he said. 'How's that for expert carving?'

'Wonderful, but I'd like to sit down again as soon as you're through admiring. Who is "Gun"?'

'Fellow named Norton. Graduated last spring. George Uhlmann Norton. A pretty good guy. Here's Plug Graves's work, and here's — no, that isn't Jenny's. I don't know who "A. L. W." is. Here's Wrenn's here. And this must be ——'

'The ancient hieroglyphics are awfully interesting,' murmured Jack, 'but you'll have to excuse me for not getting excited about them, Dan, for my tongue feels like a wad of cotton batting.'

'So does mine. Let's go on to the top and get back again to that spring. If you'd let me drink as much as I wanted to ——'

'If I had let *you* drink! That's a nice one! All right, let's toddle.'

After another minute or so the top of the wooden tower came into view and they cheered weakly. The trail kept going back and forth, growing steeper at every sharp turn, and the footing became more and more difficult. Once they had to crawl through a crevice in a huge

ledge, and Jack's foot slid off a moss-grown rock and he went to his knees very painfully. They rested twice during the last hundred yards, lying back against the rubble-strewn slope, their heels dug into the path. Then, at last, the tower stood wholly revealed and the path disappeared and they were out on a small plateau of scattered gray ledges and dry, slippery lichen and scorched grass.

When they had found their breath again they climbed the ladders that led to the highest of the two platforms of the tower and sank down exhaustedly on the bench that encircled it. For a few moments neither took much interest in the far-flung view, but presently they were gazing interestedly about them, picking out familiar objects in the distant landscape and speculating as to others. They could trace the course of river and railroad northward and southward for several miles; and here and there the road popped into view from the trees. Northwestward, so close that it seemed they could have thrown a stone to it, Holly Mountain thrust its rounded summit toward them. It looked considerably lower than Collier, but Dan said the difference in height was very little. 'Remember you're looking down from a forty-foot tower, laddie. There's the edge of the ravine; see it? See where the stained ledge is? There's a sort of path down the face, but that guy Poretfield is the only one I ever heard of who got down by it. It doesn't look good to me. Of course

it's a nice shortcut, but I'd rather keep my health.'

'But we didn't see the ravine coming up,' Jack objected.

'Didn't get around far enough. We could have seen it, though, just after we hit the School Trail if it hadn't been for the trees. Like to go down that way?'

Jack smiled and shook his head. 'No, thanks, not without a rope. And a bit of edelweiss!'

But later, having rested and cooled off, he felt more adventurous.

CHAPTER VIII

OVER THE EDGE

JACK interrupted Dan's discourse to exclaim interestedly: 'I say, you can see the football field from here! There's the grandstand, as large as life, Dan, and the running track, and a bit of the gymnasium roof, I think.'

Dan nodded. 'I know,' he answered. 'And if you had a telescope or a pair of field-glasses you'd probably see Fishgill somewhere around there crawling about on his hands and knees.'

'Who's he, Dan? Oh, I remember, the odd-looking chap you pointed out the other day. You said he roomed with Plug Graves. But why crawling about?'

'Worms,' answered Dan soberly.

'Worms?' Jack suspected a joke and smiled wanly.

'Well, bugs, too. You see Fish has a sort of mania for 'em. I think he specializes on earth-worms; all kinds of squirmy things that live in the ground; but he doesn't disdain a nice beetle or a mushy slug.'

'But what does he do with them? Puts them in spirits, eh?'

'I'd say he rather took the spirits out of them.'

'I meant alcohol, of course. He preserves them?'

'Oh, religiously! He has a kind of chest quite full of the most beautiful worms and such, Jack. He showed them to me once last year. Really, there was hardly a worm that your soul could covet that Fish didn't have floating around in little bottles and looking at you sort of — sort of wistfully. And any number of delicious bugs in match boxes. Still, you could tell that the bugs weren't as close to Fish's heart as the nice worms.'

Jack made a wry face and said 'Ugh!'

'Last fall,' continued Dan reminiscently, 'two other philanthropical souls and I decided to do Fish a great kindness. So we spent all of an hour hunting worms for him. Naturally we decided on fishworms. After back-breaking labor we got about a pint of particularly peppy ones. You know, the sort that just aren't satisfied to stay where they're put. We had them in an old lard pail that we got from the kitchen, and, so they wouldn't smother to death, we punched holes in the lid of it. Then we waited on Fish in a body, with a rather clever speech to deliver. But we were out of luck because when we got to the room no one was in. We waited awhile, but he didn't come and so we set the lard pail on his side of the table, where he'd be sure to see it when he did arrive and went off. Going back to Lower House — we were all L.M.s — we pictured how pleased

Fish would be when he found our present, and we got quite a kick out of our benevolence. On the way, though, one of the fellows, Macomber, said: "Look here, suppose he doesn't get back until late. What's going to happen to those dear little crawlers?" We asked him what he had on his alleged mind, and he explained that he didn't feel right about leaving the worms the way we had. He said there were so many of them that, even allowing for the few holes we'd made in the lid, they were bound to use up the oxygen very quickly, and if they did all Fish would find would be a pailful of corpses. He said we should have taken the lid off. Of course it came to me at once that he was absolutely right, but the other fellow said wouldn't the worms crawl out of the pail, and Macomber said they would. Then we stood there in front of Academy and looked at each other raptly, and after a bit Mac went back to Fish's room and took the lid off the pail. He said the worms looked positively grateful to him.'

Jack, chuckling, asked, 'Did they — er — get out?'

Dan nodded. 'Yes, and that was funny, too, because Mac declared that he warned them about doing it, and Mac's perfectly truthful, and if he said he did, why, then he did! But the silly worms didn't pay any attention to his advice, I guess. Or maybe it was Fish's own fault partly. I mean, some of the worms may have wiggled out

before he got home; probably they did, because they don't crawl awfully fast and some of them were found as far away as the end of the corridor. Just the same, Fish shouldn't have gone fiddling around in the dark when he got back and knocked the pail off the desk. You can easily see that that complicated — no, let's say aggravated, the situation. He told Mac about it afterwards. By the time he had the light on, the worms were trekking in every direction, and, of course, having only two hands, and fishworms being kind of slippery, he got only about a third of them back in the pail. It was weeks later before the last one was found in the toe of a tennis shoe. Of course it was quite defunct. I don't know if you've had any experience with defunct fishworms, Jack. I thought not. Well, they — well, considering their size, they're remarkably odoriferous. Fish and Plug slept with their door and windows both wide open for about a week.'

'Plug Graves? Was he there, too?' gurgled Jack.

'Oh, yes. They've roomed together three years. It was Plug who was the more annoyed. Of course Fish didn't altogether like the business, but he's good-natured and doesn't hold a grouch. Plug, though, went right up in the air and spun around. He was going to assassinate the fellows who had left the worms there. The trouble was he couldn't find out for sure who did. The three of us were

under suspicion, but we looked so wounded and hurt when Plug accused us that he had his doubts.

‘Of course the affair created quite a sensation in Upper House, especially on their floor. You see, most of the doors were not worm-proof, as you might say. That is, the poor little worms, which probably have the homing instinct strongly developed, naturally tried to get back to the verdant mead from whence they had been taken. And a lot of them lost their way and got under the doors up and down the corridor and were found in strange places by fellows who — well, fellows who seemed to have an inherent antipathy for worms. So casualties were being reported hourly for the first day or two. Worm-hunting became the popular indoor sport in Upper House. I believe the record kill went to Harry Bradley, who lived across the hall from Fish. I forget what Harry’s bag was, but it was quite impressive. And every time he bagged a worm he strode across to Number 20 and tossed it in and said bitter things. He and Plug had a scrap about it finally, but it only went one round because they heard one of the faculty coming upstairs. Faculty, by the way, took quite an interest in the Fishworm Affair and conducted an investigation. But of course even Plug wouldn’t say much to Faculty, and so nothing came of it. Faculty rather saved the situation, though, as far as Fish and Plug were

concerned by burning some sort of chemical in their room. It smelled terrifically, and Fish said he preferred the departed worms, but they managed to sleep the first night by covering their heads, and after that it wasn't so bad.'

Jack wiped his eyes. 'Oh, I say, that was topping!' he gasped. 'How ever did you think of it?'

'I didn't. To be frank, Jack, I deserve little of the credit. It was — the third fellow who furnished the brain wave. Mac and I were merely minor actors, so to say.'

'Who was the third fellow?'

'Well, I don't know that I ought to — Look here, don't ever mention names to a soul. Even yet Plug goes rabid and bites holes in things if you say "fishworms" to him, and I guess he'd still seek vengeance if he learned who put up the job. The real genius was Jenny Wrenn.'

'Wrenn! Not really? Why, I'd never suspect him of anything like that, Dan!'

'Jenny's awfully deep.' Dan shook his head sadly. 'He will probably end bad; be a politician or a lawyer or a summer resort hotel keeper. I was dubious about introducing you to him, Jack, but it would have been difficult not to. Now that you're warned you can be on your guard. Beware of Jenny when he saunters in, looking like one of the angels in the big window in Chapel, and says, "Say, fellows, I've got an idea," because when

Jenny has an idea some one's going to froth at the mouth!'

'I think he's a corker,' declared Jack. 'I like Greg, too. Look here, oughtn't we to be starting along down?'

'Yes, I guess so. We've got just about time to make it nicely. Unless, that is, you want to save about a third of a mile and go down by the ravine.'

'Really that much? Let's look at it, anyway.'

Dan smiled and they made their way down the two ladders to the ground and went across the summit to the ledge that Dan had pointed out. Approaching it, it appeared to drop straight off into space, but when they reached it and walked cautiously to the edge Jack saw that the wall of the ravine was not nearly as steep as he had pictured it. From the ledge they looked down over the tops of the trees to a deeply shadowed notch between the two peaks. Actually, Collier and Holly were not separate hills, but merely twin summits sharing a common base. Beyond the now more distant appearing top of Holly other wooded crests arose against the western sky. Dan named two of the farther peaks, already purpling in the mists that came from the many streams about them. Jack scarcely glanced, however. He was looking down at the well-defined and apparently not difficult track leading from the ledge around a corner. Doubtless it was seldom if ever used, but

its stony surface had evidently defied the encroachment of vegetation. It didn't look hazardous, and Jack said so. Dan ceased staring at the sunlit hills and observed the trail.

'Oh, I guess you could do it,' he answered. 'Poretfield did, and others, too, I dare say. No one seems to know who made it in the first place, but maybe it was a deer track.'

'I'll try if you will,' said Jack.

Dan shook his head. 'No, thanks,' he answered lightly. 'I'm a trifle too bulky to emulate the resilient mountain goat. Besides, you aren't in earnest, are you?'

'Why, yes. Why not? Any one could go down there. All you've got to do is keep your weight inward toward the slope and watch your step. You can hold on to something, too, and even if you did fall you wouldn't go far, with all the trees below you.'

'That's all right so far as we can see the path,' said Dan, 'but it's a bit of a way to the bottom, and for all we know it may not be as easy going farther down. I wonder if we can see any more of it from farther along.'

They walked to the other side of the big rock and looked, but the trail was hidden from view. Apparently it bent under the ledge as it descended, and, although Jack lay on his stomach, squirmed to the rim and peered over, he could see nothing of it.

'Perhaps it doesn't go past here, after all,' he suggested, dusting fragments of granite and dried grass from his trousers. 'Still, you said that fellow from school went down.'

'Oh, there's a way, all right. You can see quite a bit of it from the ravine if you look up. But I guess we'd better leave it alone, old chap. No use breaking our necks to save a quarter of a mile.'

'You said a third before,' Jack charged.

'To be exact, then, five sixteenths,' Dan corrected gravely. 'Even so, though, one sixteenth doesn't represent to me the value of my neck! Are you really set on trying it?'

Jack smiled apologetically. 'I'd rather like to, but if you don't want to ——'

'Oh, shucks, I'm game. It may mean that Gene will have to find another right tackle, but never let it be said that Daniel Clinton deserted a comrade. The one condition I make, Jack, is that I go ahead. If the mountain will hold me, it's pretty sure to hold you. Let's go then.'

There was a drop of a few feet from ledge to path, but the latter was wide here and the slope beyond not very abrupt. Dan went down first and Jack followed. Fortunately both had left coats and waistcoats at school and wore sweaters. They had, too, donned rubber-soled shoes for the hike, and these were preferable to leather soles on the present adventure. The trail was littered, was, in fact, in places inches deep, with fragments of rock

from the overhanging cliff; pieces as large as a hand as well as disintegrated granules, and all sizes between. These made the footing more uncertain than had appeared from above, but, as Jack had said, there were plenty of hand-holds, and Dan, humming softly, made unhurried progress for some twelve or fifteen yards. The descent began at an easy slant, and by keeping one's weight on the heels and leaning slightly toward the face of the crumbling ledge there was no need as yet of more than ordinary caution. The upper branches of the trees below reached to the path or above it. Occasionally a smaller tree grew fairly from the edge. They had the comforting feeling that, should they miss their footing, their descent would be speedily stopped. The path varied from eighteen inches to well over two feet in width.

'If it's all like this,' said Jack, 'it will be dead easy.'

'But,' replied Dan, several feet ahead, 'it isn't.' He had reached the limit of the path as seen from the ledge and now paused for the other to overtake him. 'Here's where the engineer who constructed this boulevard began to get humorous. Have a look, son.'

Jack had a look and felt less assured. The trail dropped suddenly over a projecting slab of granite and after a sharp slant disappeared to the left beyond the lower exposure of the great ledge.

But Jack had embarked on the enterprise, and it was, he assured himself stoutly, going to take more than a scramble to turn him back. 'That isn't going to be hard,' he said. 'We can sort of sit down and slide, can't we?'

'Yes, but what's worrying me is where the blamed thing goes to after it gets past that turn there. You know, while I hate to spoil any fellow's fun, I have a well-developed hunch that the wisest thing for us to do is back-trail!'

Jack considered a moment. Then: 'Let me go ahead, Dan,' he said. 'I'm lighter and squirmier than you, you know; more like one of those fish-worms you told about; and I'll have a peek around the corner and see what it's like beyond.'

'Oh, no, you won't. If you want to proceed, proceed is what we do. Anyway, if you got ahead of me I'd have to lie down and let you walk over my prostrate form, and I don't fancy that. After all, I don't know but what I prefer going down this avenue to coming up it!'

Dan slid over the worn rock, reached the path below, and, half-squatting and braking with his hands as he might, arrived at the corner. There, by clinging to the rock which showed an unfriendly inclination to overhang the trail, he drew himself erect. Jack came to a sitting position just behind him and awaited the verdict. After a moment Dan said, without turning his head: 'Not so good, laddie, but I guess we can make it. There's

a rather frisky bit of road-building just ahead. The contractor skimped on the job, seems like, and the path isn't much more than a foot wide. But it looks pretty firm, and after about six yards it widens out quite decently. Goes fairly straight, too, and not very steep. Wish I could see past the top of that hemlock. How far do you suppose we've gone, Jack?'

Jack tried to see the summit, but the ledge shut off his view only a few feet above him. Looking downward only the green shadows of the trees met his gaze. 'I don't know,' he replied. 'Maybe forty feet. What do you think?'

'Less than that, I'm afraid, and the whole distance must be fully a hundred. However, if you're game we'll go ahead.'

'I'll follow you,' answered Jack cheerfully. Nevertheless, a good deal of his enthusiasm had left him, and if Dan had insisted then on retracing their steps he would have been not a little relieved. But Dan didn't. He went forward circumspectly and slowly, crouching a little and hugging the ledge with both hands. Jack saw his left hand move inch by inch along the rock and finally disappear. For an instant Jack hesitated. Then, however, he pulled himself up gingerly, as Dan had done, straightened and craned his head slightly to view the path beyond. And as he did so there came a sound that sent the blood from his heart.

What he heard from around the corner of the ledge was something between a gasp and a groan that was stilled as instantly as begun. With it came the clatter of displaced stones and their trickling fall down the slope. Afterwards it seemed to Jack as though he must have stood there, weak of knee and silent, for minutes before he found his voice, but finally he shouted:

'Dan! Are you all right?'

He still lacked courage to move forward and outward the few inches necessary for a view of what lay ahead, and although there was no instant reply to his hail he continued to stand there, clutching the rock beside him with frantic fingers. Then Dan's voice came to him. It sounded different from common; steady but a little high-pitched.

'All right so far, Jack, but I'm afraid I can't keep this up long. Where are you?'

Jack found his nerve then, edged nearer and stared apprehensively past the sharp corner of the ledge. Dan had not exaggerated the difficulties of that stretch of trail; more, he had not told all. For there, for the first time since it had started, it ran along the edge of a sheer drop of some forty or fifty feet. There were no reassuring trees to interrupt a fall; the tops of a very few showed a short distance below, but they promised no help. Dan had edged his way, facing the cliff, across almost half of the narrow path. Then a foot had trusted

to a loose stone, he had felt himself going, had dropped to his knees, clutching ineffectually, and had slid over the edge. Now he hung there, his right forearm and his left hand supporting the weight of his body.

'Dan!' gasped Jack, panic seizing on him anew.

'Don't lose — your nerve,' said Dan. *'Get back if you can and — and find help. I don't think I can hold on — long, but I'll — do my best.'*

CHAPTER IX

JACK STANDS BY

JACK felt physically ill, and closed his eyes for a moment to shut out the scene. He tried to think, but his mind seemed revolving dizzily, and not until Dan spoke again did he succeed in bringing his senses back under control.

‘Won’t you go?’ pleaded Dan. ‘There’s not too much time, Jack.’ He tried to smile; succeeded in a wry fashion that curved only one corner of his tightly set mouth. Jack steadied himself with an effort, opened his eyes, and shook his head.

‘I’m not going,’ he answered almost composedly. ‘It would be no use, Dan. I’d be half an hour getting to the nearest house and it would take as long to get back. Give me a minute.’ He stared past Dan, his eyes wide, two little creases above his nose. After much less than the time requested, his gaze returned to his companion. ‘Can you touch anything with your feet?’ he asked.

‘No. I tried. I’m hanging straight down. If I could work my way — toward you about six feet — I think I could reach the ledge, but I’m afraid to, Jack. There’s — there’s nothing to hold to. And my arms are getting — awfully wobbly!’

Jack’s frown deepened and he looked swiftly

about him. 'Can you hold on five minutes longer?' he asked.

Dan's lips tightened. 'Yes. Can you think of anything — any way ——'

'Don't talk. I'll get you somehow. I've got to go back a way. There's more room there. I won't be long.'

'All right, but ——' Dan bit off the rest of the sentence. Jack was cautiously turning his body in the narrow space, holding his breath as he did so. 'How far is it to — the bottom?' asked Dan laboredly.

'Too far to drop,' answered Jack briefly. 'Forget the bottom and hold tight.' He crept back to the rock over which they had scrambled, aiding his ascent with knees and hands. There was little wider space there for his feet, while above the slope fell back more sharply. His mind worked busily now. He tossed his cap onto the ledge and tugged at his sweater. It went on over the head, and removing it in such a tiny space was not easy. But he had it off presently, and then squirmed out of his shirt. The sweater was fairly heavy and Jack hoped desperately that it was as strong and tough as it appeared. He knotted the ends of the shirt sleeves and the sweater sleeves firmly together, took a deep breath with tightly closed eyes, and then went back down the descent to the corner of the jutting ledge.

Dan's eyes lighted at sight of the improvised

rope, but clouded again as he realized its insufficiency. He started to speak, but Jack forbade. 'Don't talk,' he directed authoritatively. 'You'll need your breath. I'm going to crawl toward you until I can get an end of this thing to you. Then you're to get hold of it with your right hand. Whatever happens, don't let go. It's strong enough to stand your weight, Dan. Edge yourself this way. I'll watch you and tell you where to put your hands.'

'I can't,' groaned Dan. 'My arms are shaking. There's no strength in them!'

'You've got to! It's the only chance. It's just your nerves that are bad; your muscles are all right, and you'll find it out when you begin to use them.'

Very carefully Jack lowered himself to his knees and then to his stomach, took the knotted garments in his teeth and crawled around the corner. He was frightened and it seemed to him that every nerve in his body was twitching, but he kept on and in a moment lay stretched on the narrow trail within ten feet of where Dan hung by trembling arms. With his face close to the uneven, crumbling edge of the path he looked straight down to the cumulated rocks below and shuddered. A fall there meant certain death, and, if his plan went awry, it was more than probable that not only Dan but he too would go crashing down to those jagged boulders. He shifted his eyes toward the

rocky litter of the path and breathed deeply. Perhaps Dan, watching strainedly, surmised his thoughts, for he said almost gently:

‘It’s not worth it, Jack. I’ll hold on a bit longer and then — take my chance. You go back, old chap. It’s no good.’

Jack made no answer. By inches he edged forward. Finally he gathered the knotted garments before him, fumblingly, grasped one end of them in his left hand and tried to toss the other toward Dan. But it fell far short, and he began his slow writhing again. Another effort placed the knotted sleeves within six inches of Dan’s farther hand, but still out of reach of the clutching fingers. He tried again and this time the big knot landed right.

‘Grasp the sleeves above the knot, Dan,’ he gasped.

Dan obeyed, gripping his trembling fingers about the sleeves without moving the forearm hooked over the sloping edge. ‘This is cowardly,’ he groaned. ‘If I go now you’ll come, too.’

‘Maybe, but I don’t think so. I’m stronger than you think, and I’ll keep the thing cramped over the edge, and that ought to help. But you’re not to fall, Dan, until you’re at the corner; not then if you can help it. But if you should fall, then there’s a chance, for the trees begin there and you mightn’t go far. Wait till I’ve worked back a bit before you move.’

Going backward was far more difficult, and every time a searching foot failed to find the path Jack's heart missed a beat. The white shirt and the brown sweater stretched taut at last. Jack grasped them frenziedly, pushed himself close to the rock and said a little prayer, a rather confused petition. Then: 'All right, Dan. Let's — let's go. There's a spot about four inches this side for your left hand. Try to find it. There's a three-cornered sort of stone there.'

He watched Dan's hand push, with agonized effort to the left, heard his gasp as he drove his courage to the task. 'Still farther,' whispered Jack. 'Another inch! There! How does it feel?'

Dan slowly let his weight rest on the new hold. A few pebbles trickled over the edge, but the white-knuckled fingers stayed. Slowly the other forearm dragged to a new position. Jack crept a little farther toward the corner, tightening the makeshift rope again. As he had predicted, Dan's muscles were still capable, and now, being called on, they responded. Inch by inch, he pulled the weight of his body nearer the corner, the perspiration beading his forehead and every line of his face attesting the terrific strain he was under. It was slow, torturing progress, but progress it was, and if only he could hold out ——

There was a mingled gasp from both the boys. Dan's left hand slipped away under a little rush

of stones and gravel and for an awful instant only the right hand and forearm supported him. Then, while a look of despair flashed into his face, and Jack, gritting his teeth, held with all his strength to the garments, the frantically groping hand found a new purchase before the body swung away at that side.

Jack dropped his head onto a bare arm and for a long moment there was silence. Then Dan's voice came huskily: 'It's no good, Jack. I'm through. I can't get — any farther.'

Jack lifted his head quickly. 'You're not through!' he cried. 'You've got plenty of fight left, Dan! Don't be yellow! There's only another four or five feet. Rest a second and then come on again.'

'I'm so tired,' sobbed Dan.

'Come another four feet and you can rest,' answered Jack. 'Don't give up now. That would be rotten, Dan. Please try. Please!'

Jack had a problem now almost as difficult as Dan's. Behind him the path turned, not abruptly, but still considerably, and, beyond the corner, became exceedingly steep. He must, pushing himself backwards, face-down on that narrow trail, make that turn; and he must do it without losing his firm grip on the twisted rope, without for a moment leaving himself unprepared to throw every atom of strength against the sudden terrific strain of Dan's falling weight. He wondered if he

could do it; told himself savagely that he must do it; and even then began the effort.

It seemed minutes before Dan at last caught his breath with a long-drawn gasp and responded to the other's encouragement. 'Where?' he asked hoarsely.

'About six inches this way,' answered Jack. 'Go ahead. I'll tell you when — There! Not too far! Got it? Careful now!'

The slow, painful work of drawing forward the hand clutching the knotted sleeves followed and another half-foot had been gained. Jack saw without words from Dan that the latter's endurance was about at its end. He wanted to cry 'Faster!' yet feared that haste would bring disaster in its wake.

'Hold it a minute,' he said. 'I've got to get my legs around here.' Pushing, digging scarred elbows into the stony litter, seeking behind him with his feet, at last he worked his body half around the corner, lying now with his face to the cliff, realizing fearfully that if the test came now he would not be able to meet it, longing to clutch at the friendly rock beside him, but forced to keep both hands tight about the garments that once more stretched taut between him and Dan.

'All right,' he called at last. 'I can't tell you when you're right this time, Dan, but it's about another six inches. Test it well before you put all your weight on it.' He listened nervously. It had

been hard enough to watch Dan's progress, but now it was worse not to be able to see it, to wait anxiously——

'*Jack! I can touch!*' Dan's voice broke the silence with a note of hope. 'Maybe I can find——'

Jack heard the faint scraping of his shoes against the face of the ledge beneath. 'Don't try yet,' he advised. 'We're almost at the corner, Dan. Perhaps one more move will make it. I'm crawling back now. Are you all right?'

'Yes. The rock's there, but I can't find — any support yet.'

'The next time, Dan! Hold steady!'

Jack edged backward again with increasing difficulty. His legs were lying up the steep ascent of the path now, and the blood began to pound uncomfortably at his temples. But to his surprise he was able to get shoulders and head around the turn without pulling too tightly on the garments, and there, to his vast relief, he could lie flat once more, for the trail was wider. Only Dan's left hand was visible now, still a good yard from the corner.

Confidence, the delicious certainty of success, found its way into Jack's voice. 'We're going to make it, Dan!' he called. 'You're almost at the corner, and you'll find a foothold after the next try!'

'I know,' answered Dan, and he, too, sounded

confident. 'I'm going to make a longer move this time, Jack. I can do it — I know. Then — then it'll be over.'

'Well, if you're sure you can. Try it eight inches ——'

'More,' demanded Dan, new strength in his voice.

'Better not. Eight inches — wait, try ten then. There's a fine hold there, a rough piece of the ledge. Not too fast! Easy, Dan! Yes, that's it. Can you make it?'

Dan's face had moved into sight now, and, although his eyes were closed, it was once more resolute. The knuckles of the nearer hand whitened, the eyes opened, and his gaze swept downward. His feet sought the face of the ledge below. Jack watched anxiously. Suddenly the strain on the left hand relaxed and Dan raised thankful eyes to Jack's.

'Got it,' he said with a sort of sob. 'Got one foot on something down there! Oh, gosh, what a relief!' He leaned his forehead against the crook of his right arm. Jack thought he was crying, but he wasn't, for after a moment he raised his head again and there was a crooked smile on his mouth. 'Just a minute,' he whispered. 'I'm — about — all in!'

After that he once more moved along the edge, and then, somehow — neither of them later could have told just how — with Jack tugging until the

perspiration poured down his face and Dan wriggling and scrambling and fighting tooth and nail, the end came. Dan lay, breathing hard, on the trail, his head on Jack's knee, while below them in the silence the shadows gathered deeper and darker in the depths of the ravine.

CHAPTER X

THE SCRUB GOES INTO ACTION

PRESENTLY they climbed back to the summit, none too easily after what they had been through, and Jack replaced shirt and sweater on a shivering body. Then he stretched himself again beside Dan and they lay in silence for many minutes, staring up into the blue or off across the purpling hills, prey to a pleasant lassitude. They were a rather disheveled pair. Faces and hands were soiled, clothes were torn, shoes were scuffed. But, much more important, they were alive. Dan rolled over with a groan for his aching muscles.

'Guess we oughtn't to stay here,' he murmured. 'It's getting chilly. How about it?'

'Ready when you are,' answered Jack. He sat up and observed his companion solicitously. 'How do you feel, Dan?'

'Fine, except for my arms. I guess they'll be stiff as the dickens to-morrow. Wonder if I could get Pete to rub them for me. Probably couldn't find him this evening, though.'

'I'll rub them. What you ought to do is get into a hot bath as soon as you're back.'

'Won't be time. We'll have to go some to make it for supper as it is. And you're having supper with your mother, aren't you?'

'Yes, but that doesn't matter. I mean to say if you want me to rub you ——'

'Let it wait until bedtime. I'll get some liniment at the gym after supper. Look here, old son, how do you feel about keeping this business under your hat? There's sure to be a lot of talk if we tell it, and Faculty will throw a fit, I dare say, and put this place out of bounds. It's doing you out of some credit ——'

'Nonsense, I'm perfectly willing to keep mum. As for credit, that's piffle. If I hadn't insisted on going down there, we wouldn't have got into trouble.'

'There's nothing to that, Jack. Mighty few folks make me do anything I don't want to. I fell for it because I thought I was going to have a sort of joke on you. Thought you'd be rather sorry you were so brash after we'd got down a way. Where I pulled a boner was not knowing how tricky the thing was.' Dan climbed to his feet, stretched gingerly, winced and continued as the other joined him and they started across toward the path by which they had arrived. 'Of course, you know, you saved my life, Jack, and that's something it's just a bit difficult to — to ——'

'Rot! You saved your own life. If you hadn't had the nerve to help yourself ——'

'I wouldn't have had if you hadn't told me what to do and made me do it. It was the sweater that gave me the courage, although I knew all the time

that if I slipped off, it wouldn't really help me a bit.'

'I think I could have held you. There was only once when I wasn't fixed to, Dan. That was ——'

'I know; when you were at the corner. But you couldn't have held me at any time, old son, and you wouldn't have had to.'

'What do you mean?' asked Jack, startled.

'Why, you silly ass, do you suppose I'd have pulled you over too? What would have been the sense in that?' Dan shook his head. 'Oh, no, old-timer, I made up my mind that if I did go I'd let loose. I was awfully afraid that I wouldn't, though; or, at least, not quickly enough. You see, to be absolutely honest, I was pretty well scared, Jack.'

'So was I,' muttered Jack, with a shiver. 'I think I was most frightened just at first, when you told me to go for help.' Dan looked a question. 'I was afraid I'd do it!'

'I see.' Dan was silent a moment. 'I'd have hated it if you had. Being left alone, I mean.'

'What did you suggest it for, then?'

Dan shrugged. 'Oh, well, I thought it would be better if you didn't — if you weren't around when ——'

'You knew blamed well,' complained Jack, 'that there wasn't the ghost of a chance of my finding any one in time.'

'Of course, but I hadn't the remotest idea of

being able to get back on that trail, knew I couldn't hang there more than five or ten minutes, and I figured that if you were around when I let go you might — well, kind of lose your nerve, you know, and maybe come a cropper too. I guess it wasn't very well reasoned out, but that seems to have been the main idea. Well, you wouldn't go ——'

'I wanted to,' murmured Jack dismally.

'So would I have. But you didn't. So, you see, old man, you're rather a hero, no matter how you look at it.'

'Not I,' declared Jack protestingly. 'I didn't edge along that crumbly old path with my arms just about breaking, with a fifty-foot drop and a bunch of nice big boulders waiting for me!'

'All right,' chuckled Dan, 'have it your way. That doesn't alter the fact that I'm eternally grateful to you, or that, to the best of my ability, I'll square accounts, son. It may take me some time; I may never actually do it; but I'll surely try.'

Jack faced him in alarm. 'Now, look here, if you're going to act the silly ass about this I'll — I'll quit! I didn't do a thing more than any fellow would have done, and I won't have you — I won't have you making — pretending it was anything.'

'Well, what do you want me to do?' asked Dan mildly.

'Why, just forget it. That's what I'm going to do.'

'Very well. Only, of course, you won't forget it. But if you like to pretend, all right. I'll pretend, too. That suit you?'

Jack refused to see the quizzical gleam in Dan's eyes and nodded. 'How far is it to that spring?' he asked.

'About ten minutes farther. I'll be glad to see it. We'd better wash up a bit, too, if we don't want fellows asking questions. Thank goodness, we're walking down instead of up; although I don't feel any too spry, at that.'

At the spring Dan said, 'Kind of looks as if I owe you a shirt, Jack.'

Jack observed the soiled and rumpled garment with a grin. 'You can send me one at Christmas.' Then, as he squirmed into his sweater again: 'It'll be quite all right once it's been laundered. Do you mind me telling you that you've still got a gob of dirt on your chin?'

'Not if you don't object to being informed that those trousers are going to need the services of a tailor before they'll be fit to wear again. I'm not sure that I don't owe you a whole new outfit, Jack. Even your sweater ——'

'Will you shut up? I thought you agreed to forget it!'

'Well,' replied Dan meekly, 'I supposed I didn't have to start until we'd got back to school.'

'Which we never will if we don't hump ourselves,' grumbled the other.

'All right, slave-driver, let's go. Just the same, I do feel guilty about that shirt.'

Of course they couldn't keep off the subject of their recent adventure very long, and before they were back in sight of the school buildings they had discussed it very thoroughly and at much length, Dan dwelling feelingly on his sensations when he found his feet slipping from the path and when, by what seemed a miracle now, he had brought up clinging to the edge. 'Gee, the way those stones went rattling down, Jack! I could hear them hit the bottom, and every time one did I almost shivered myself loose! Mountain climbing may be rich, red meat for some, but it's poison for me!'

Since, observing their agreement, neither of the two divulged what had happened, the school never heard of it. Jack wanted Dan's permission to tell his mother, but it was refused. 'Have a heart,' begged Dan. 'Your mother would never let you play with me again. She'd say I led you into danger, you see. No, sir, I'm going to hold you to your promise, old son. Mum's the word.'

So mum it was. But if any one save Jack and Dan had been in Number 37 that evening between nine-thirty and ten he might well have wondered. Both boys showed evidences of the adventure in the shape of contusions and scratches and even

missing skin. Jack's knees were a lovely shade of violet, and Dan pretended to admire them vastly. Dan exhibited fewer scars than his companion, but by bedtime he was scarcely able to move his arms at the shoulders, and even his lungs felt sore. Both boys took hot baths and then, with the windows wide to permit the escape of the pungent fumes of the rubbing mixture Dan had abstracted from the gymnasium, they ministered to each other's aching muscles. At least, Dan earnestly tried to make the affair mutual, but Jack speedily and scornfully told him that as a masseur he was a flat-tire, seized the liniment bottle from him, bade him lie down, and for a full twenty minutes rubbed and kneaded to an accompaniment of grateful groans from the patient.

Dan had to take a cut from football practice on Monday, but Jack carried on after a fashion; a fashion that caused Coach Hopkins to view him a bit dubiously and wonder if he had not possibly been too generous with his commendations. Fortunately for sore and stiffened muscles, Jack was called on for nothing exceedingly strenuous that afternoon, since, having played for a time on Saturday, he was exempt from everything save signal drill.

On Tuesday the squad was pared down to twenty-eight, and on Thursday the second eleven appeared and prepared to sell their lives dearly. However, since Coach Hopkins had been drilling

two new plays into the first team, and since this had resulted in a mild form of mental if not physical exhaustion, the scrub put up rather a brilliant opposition considering that this was their first scrimmage. The opponents went through one ten-and one eight-minute period and the second escaped with an uncrossed goal line. The only scores were field goals from the expert toe of Gregory Knight and the less expert and, perhaps, rather lucky toe of Pop Somers who substituted Greg in the second period. Somehow the first team attack petered out as soon as the opponent's twenty yards was reached.

Jack had forgotten his aches and bruises by now and he played a hard, stiff game on defense and would perhaps have shown up nicely on attack if, for some mysterious reason, both quarterbacks hadn't seemed disinclined to use him. He was given some punting to do, though, and at that, while his right knee still acted a trifle stiff, he matched Jerry Dabney's best efforts and certainly excelled Nick Arnould. Dan was back, of course, but he had to invent the most ingenious excuses for an apparent lack of spirit in his playing. Fred Way, at guard, beside him, disgustedly informed him once during the proceedings against the scrub that he probably had sleeping-sickness and ought to do something about it.

Now and then, on the field or when they passed

in the corridors, Jack met the puzzled regard of Plug Graves. Quite evidently Plug was still striving to place Jack, as the phrase is. Twice, too, they met in some fellow's room, and although Plug didn't again revert to the subject Jack knew that he hadn't yet acknowledged defeat. Dan noted with a feeling of curiosity and discomfort that Plug Graves's presence had the effect of making Jack silent and sober. He frequently found himself wondering whether, in spite of Jack's implied denial, there might not be something in it; whether, in fact, the two had not met before, as Plug insisted they had; and he tried to imagine some satisfactory explanation of Jack's unwillingness to acknowledge the meeting.

On his part, Jack was rather surprised to discover that a few evenings after they had almost come to blows in Gregory's room, Plug and Dan met again quite as though nothing had occurred. Of course he knew Dan well enough to realize that his chum wasn't the sort to harbor malice. Indeed, he doubted if Dan could even entertain it. Certainly not for long. What he didn't understand was that Plug's particular brand of vanity made it impossible for him to conceive of any one seriously disapproving of him. Oh, some fellow might flare up for a moment, Plug reasoned, but that didn't mean anything; he'd get right over it, of course. To Plug, his own rough joviality seemed irresistible, and even if some chap did

manage to hold a grouch overnight he could soon jolly him out of it.

As a matter of fact others didn't stay angry with Plug very long, for what was the use? You simply couldn't convince him that you really were displeased and that the fault was his, and when the subject of your anger is unconscious of it and treats you as if you were a rather comical chap who must have his joke, why, you just get discouraged and give it up! Dan had long since given up; that is, if he had ever actually started. Dan gave Plug credit for certain merits, among them the ability to play a very fine brand of football, but he didn't like the fellow, and he rather enjoyed annoying him. What popularity Plug possessed among certain of the fellows was due to his prowess on the gridiron rather than to his winning personality. And yet this rule, like all others, had its exception.

Tom Fishgill cared not a hoot for football and perhaps couldn't have told you what position Plug played, in spite of which the two had roomed together for two years and were started on their third, and Fish was probably the only chap in school with whom Plug was really intimate. Contrawise, Fish had no close friend save Plug. As proof of Fish's devotion to his 'roomy,' any fellow who knew them would recite the incident of Plug's protest.

It happened during the first year of their com-

panionship. Fish's collection of worms and similar horrors was then in its infancy, but Plug got no joy from it. He said it made him sick to look at it and interfered with his appetite to smell it. Fish was apologetic, even remorseful, but he still came home with new treasures of a crawly, and, in Plug's opinion, disgusting, nature. Plug growled and threatened, but he might just as well have tried to reason a bee out of gathering honey as Fish from gathering worms. Finally, his patience reaching an end one afternoon, Plug arose in his rage and threw the whole kit-and-caboodle out the third-story window of Lower House. Wide-mouthed phials lost their corks and match boxes jarred open. As it happened, however, a light fall of snow intervened for Fish. It was said that his immediate progress down two flights of stairs established a record likely to stand for all time, and, before Plug had fully realized the drastic nature of his deed, Fish was out there on his hands and knees gathering up his treasures and dampening them with his tears. He lost a few, but not enough to better the collection in Plug's eyes, and took them down to the cellar. They remained there only overnight, though, for his roommate's desolation at being parted from his beloved worms would have touched a harder heart than Plug's. Plug gave in, begged Fish to bring the rotten things upstairs again, and Fish almost fell on his neck in a revulsion of joy. Since

then Plug and Fish and the worms had dwelt together in peace, if not always in amity. Callers at Number 20 Upper complained of a not-altogether agreeable atmosphere, but even Plug declared they were imaginative. Perhaps after two years he really thought so.

All this hasn't got very much to do with the story, save that it affords certain side-lights on Plug's character and personality; and in view of the part Plug played in the drama anything that will explain him has its place here.

CHAPTER XI

'A BIT OF A MESS'

It was after the second of the mentioned encounters with Plug, in the room of Somers and Macomber, that Jack returned to Number 37 in a rather thoughtful mood which was in distinct contrast to that of Dan. Dan had attacked every conviction that Plug held sacred, Plug had glowered and finally orated, and in the end Pop Somers and Greg Knight had prevented blows. Dan had remained imperturbably seated during the crisis, which had seemed to add to Plug's grievance. He had called him a number of impolite, even insulting names, and had eventually descended to vague but sinister threats. Yet, a quarter of an hour later, he had left the room with Bob Weeks smiling and unruffled; had even included Dan in his jovial salutations of departure. He puzzled Jack, and perhaps being puzzled caused the latter's taciturnity as he climbed the stairs to the third floor. Dan chuckled now and then on the way, and, once behind the closed door, said, 'Well, Plug certainly spun on his ear to-night, didn't he?'

Jack came out of his abstraction and agreed, adding: 'I don't see what fun you get out of rag-

ging him, though, Dan. He isn't pleasant when he gets angry.'

Dan chuckled. 'Well, I don't know. Seems as though Plug to me is like candy to a kid. I just can't let him alone. Really, Jack, when he gets to talking big, I have either to jar him down or throw a chair at him. And, of course, when you're in another chap's room and the chairs don't belong to you ——' Dan waved a hand.

'But he forgets his grouch so soon,' said Jack. 'You insult him ——'

'Oh, I say!'

'Yes, you do, even if you do keep your temper. And he insults you — and loses his temper — and wants to fight. Then, five minutes later, ten at the most, he's asking you a perfectly civil question. It's too much for me.'

'Oh, that's only because you don't know Plug as well as the rest of us do. He's like that. He can get in a towering rage in a minute and snap out of it in another. I've seen him do it in a game. Last year he got mad at an Adams fellow and tried to hit him. Fred and I jumped in and grabbed him and the referee didn't happen to be looking; or pretended he wasn't. Plug told that Adams chap what he was going to do to him a-plenty. About two plays later I saw Plug helping the hated enemy to his feet. Do you know, old son, I sometimes get the idea that Plug may have a decent streak in him somewhere?'

'Most every fellow has,' said Jack a trifle sentimentously. 'But I do wish you'd try to let him alone sometimes, Dan. He's like a red rag to a bull, I suppose, and he is trying when he starts chucking his weight about, but——'

'Once more,' interrupted the other. 'What was that about his weight?'

'Chucking his weight about? Well, what would you say?'

'You mean putting on side? High-hatting? I like that. "Chucking his weight about"! It's awfully pat in Plug's case. You know, Jack, no one would suspect you were English if now and then you didn't come out with something like that and give yourself away.'

'I'm not English. I mean, I don't feel so. I've been over here so long that I think of myself as American. When I'm old enough I intend to get — get — naturalized; isn't that what you call it? You see, I don't believe we'll ever go back to England. Not to stay, anyway. I didn't think I used much English slang. Sometimes, after Dad's been home, I find myself talking rather like he does.'

Dan hesitated and then asked, 'I suppose your father will be turning up before long, won't he?'

Jack shifted his gaze and for an instant became seemingly absorbed in getting his books together under the light. Then he answered, 'I fancy so. He — he's a bit uncertain.'

'I see,' replied Dan carelessly. But there was a lot he didn't see. Jack's father still continued a good deal of a mystery. Neither Mrs. Devitt nor Jack referred to him save infrequently and, or so it seemed to Dan, guardedly. Well, it was none of his business, of course, and he couldn't very well ask more than he had. He looked across the table and surprised Jack's gaze fixed on him intently. It was as though the other's eyes asked a question; and perhaps Dan's honest eyes answered it, for Jack blurted:

'I'd like to tell you, Dan. Mother thinks I should, too. She wanted me to right at first, but — but I've kind of hated to, you see. It's about my father. But you want to study, don't you?'

'*Want* to study! Did I ever?' Dan spoke flippantly, but, whereas a week ago his tone would have closed Jack up as tight as any clam, now Jack only smiled responsively.

Since that Sunday afternoon on Mount Collier the two seemed to have come much closer together, to understand each other much more thoroughly. Jack's smile died quickly, though, and he jabbed a pencil point into the desk-pad for a moment and intently studied the results before he went on. When he did he spoke slowly, as though anxious to choose his words carefully lest he should fail to convey to the hearer the meaning intended.

'I told you we used to live in a little town called

Westdale in England. It's not far from London; only some twenty-seven miles. It was mother's home before she married. Only when she was married Dad bought a place. I was born there. Dad came from Sussex; "Silly Sussex," you know.' Dan didn't know, but he nodded. 'He and mother met at some sort of garden party or tea. Mother says they saw each other first over a row of hollyhocks; I tell her that Dad may have seen her over so, but that she couldn't possibly look over a hollyhock! Anyhow, they fell in love with each other on the dot and inside a month they were married. I don't remember awfully much about "The Oaks"; only that I had a pretty good time of it. It was one of those places — Westdale, I mean — where nothing much ever happens, I fancy. Nothing much did happen until the War came.'

'I was about five then, I think; perhaps six. Father wanted to join up right away, but mother was ill just then, and it wasn't until the beginning of the next year that he left. He had more than a year of it and then was invalided home and stayed seven months. He'd won a captaincy by then, and as soon as he was up and around he went back. He was with the Second Leicester after that. He was away the last time almost two years. Then he was injured again. This time it was rather serious. He was in a hospital in France for months and months and then they sent him home. Ex-

cept that he limped a bit, Dan, he seemed quite all right — at first. Then one day — but never mind that.'

Jack paused, studying the hand that still held the pencil, motionless now. 'It was shell-shock,' he went on. 'The doctors said he only needed rest and a chance to forget what he'd been through, and so mother did everything she could and kept on hoping that he'd be all right again finally. But he wasn't. He never has been. You mustn't think that he's — well, violent. Not ever. He's quite normal for weeks, sometimes a couple of months at a time; just like he always used to be; and he really is a corker, Dan, when he's well; jolly no end, and as kind to mother and me as any one could be. Then something will happen, some little thing, and he's gone to pieces. If we could only know what sort of thing was going to upset him, we could guard against it, I think, but we can't. Once, before we left England, the maid stepped on old Bolger's tail; Bolger was our cat; and poor Dad went right off the handle. He's just piteous when he's that way, Dan. Goes in a heap and cries and cries; frightened stiff, I fancy. Then, if he isn't watched, he walks out and you don't hear from him for weeks. It's that way still.'

'How long does it — do the illnesses last, Jack?'

'Sometimes a day, sometimes three or four.

Mother thinks he gets over them quicker than he used to, but I don't know. It's a beastly shame. He's such a good sort when he's all right, Dan!'

'I'm sure he is,' agreed Dan heartily. 'But isn't there anything they can do? Hospitals, I mean. Psychopathic places, eh?'

'He's been treated time after time. Twice he was discharged as cured. Another time he ran away. The last place they said he was incurable, but that his case wasn't serious enough to require treatment. He sort of gave up then. That was two years ago. You see, we thought a change of scene might help; getting away from England and all that; and Dad thought so, too, and so we sold out over there and came to the States. For a while it did seem to help. Dad got a position with an automobile firm as demonstrator; he's a corking driver; and held it nearly a year, and mother and I thought he was all right again. Then one of the men in the shop got hurt one day, and Dad happened to be there and he went off again. That ended him there. After that he was a swimming instructor at a club in New York, and after that he went on the road for a house that sells mining machinery. But it's always the same in the end. Sometimes we get a telegram saying that he's been taken ill — a nervous breakdown they generally call it — and sometimes we don't know anything about it. It's beastly hard on mother.'

'Of course,' assented Dan gently. 'But, look

here, Jack, what about — well, money? You don't mind me asking, eh?'

'Oh, that's all right, that part of it, thanks. I mean to say we get on very nicely. Mother had a little of her own when she married, and Dad saved for a while. Of course all that's gone now for hospital and doctors' bills and one thing and another, but Dad sends money back whenever he's making any, and mother does a little needlework — she's a dab at embroidery, Dan ——'

'I know. She showed me some the other day. Remember? But I didn't know she — she ——'

Jack nodded. 'We get on quite all right. I wanted to go to a less expensive school, but we talked it over, and there was the coincidence of the name, you know, and so we decided to try it here for a year anyway. I keep telling mother that I ought to be doing some sort of work and fetching home some money, but she doesn't want that. She thinks a fellow's got to have an education, Dan, no matter what happens.'

'Dare say she's right. Where's your father now, Jack?'

Jack shrugged. 'Last we heard was in August. He was a time-keeper in some factory in a place called New Wales in Wisconsin. He sent quite a sum of money. Since then we haven't heard a word. We wrote out there, but the letters came back. I dare say he doesn't always use his own name nowadays. That's the part that makes it

so hard for mother; not knowing whether Dad's alive or — or dead. He writes pretty regularly while he's employed, but other times he doesn't make a sign; won't until he's on his feet again. Of course he doesn't know where we are, because in the last letter that mother wrote — the last one he got, I mean — she didn't say anything about coming here. Didn't know then. Still, if he tries, he can find us easily enough. And just the last week or so mother's been sort of expecting him. She hasn't said so, but I can always tell. She's generally right, too.

'Too bad to bore you stiff with all this, but you've been so awfully nice to us, to mother and me, too, that we both thought you ought to know. Mother was afraid you'd think there was something really wrong with father; you know, differently wrong; and she didn't want you should. I've been kind of trying to tell you for a week. Glad I have, now it's over with. Of course there isn't any need for any one else to know. Even if Dad should come here he'd not stay long. He seldom does. Probably the fellows wouldn't know about him.'

'If you mean that I'm not to tell, why, that's understood,' said Dan. 'I suppose your mother doesn't like to talk about this, Jack; wouldn't want to talk to me about it, I mean.'

'I don't think she'd mind it, Dan, now that you've heard it. You see, she isn't ashamed of

Dad. It's only that — well, folks who don't know about him sometimes think wrong things. She didn't want you to. Neither did I, and I was pretty sure you must be wondering about him; where he was and why he didn't come here and all that.'

'Why, yes, I did wonder a bit, Jack. It was none of my business, of course, but — anyhow, I'm mighty glad you told me. I wish to thunder I could do something to help.'

'Thanks, old chap. I wish you could. I wish I could. But I fancy it's just got to go on. Mother has spells of being hopeful, but I'm hanged if I can ever see why. Short of a miracle, I rather fancy poor old Dad's done for. If he'd only stop at home and let us look after him, it would be a heap better, but he won't. Can't stand the idea of not doing something to make money and help along. Throws it up at himself that the money's been all spent on him, do you see. Well, it's a bit of a mess. I say, I'm sorry I've kept you from lessons so long!'

'Oh, that,' murmured Dan. 'Huh!'

CHAPTER XII

A LOOSE BALL

SAINT GEORGE's sprang a surprise on Saturday. The game was played at Westdale, and, for the most part, in a drizzle of rain. Almost anything will serve as an alibi, and the weather was afterwards seized on eagerly by those — and their name is legion — who are constitutionally averse to facing cold facts. Without a doubt the weather influenced the playing of Mount Collier, but so it must have the playing of the blue-legged opponents; and if Saint George's had the wisdom to suit her plays to the conditions and the Blue-and-Russet didn't, why, whose fault was that? Certainly not the Weather Man's!

Saint George's presented a rather heavier line-up than that of Mount Collier. Her center trio were big, solidly built young giants, her tackles scarcely lighter if more speedy, and her ends, alone of the linemen, were of the average appearance. In the back-field the Blue offered a large variety of material, using before the contest had reached its unsatisfactory conclusion exactly eleven players. Discovering before the first period was over that her running game was destined to failure on a field too soft and slippery for quick starting and good footing, she gradually intro-

duced her heavier backs and, from a close formation in which the ball was well hidden, ploughed short furrows into the enemy. Even punts were hazardous, save at the beginning and again when a new ball was supplied at the start of the third quarter, and catching them was even more so. It was Saint George's fumble of Bob Weeks's short punt in the second quarter that paved the way for the home team's first score. Storey recovered on the Blue's fourteen yards and, with Plug Graves and Greg Knight bearing the burden of the attack, Mount Collier slammed to the goal line in eight tries. It wasn't easy going, though, and once the chain had to be dragged out and the distance measured before it could be decided whether the offense had made a first down or lost possession. It was Jerry Dabney who inched over for the touchdown; and Greg who failed miserably to put the wet ball over the bar afterwards.

Saint George's came back hard before the second period was over. There was a fumble by the Blue-and-Russet on her forty-three yards and a Saint George's end whipped through and fell on the elusive pigskin. Jerry Dabney ruefully explained afterwards that every one by that time was so plastered with mud that it was hard to distinguish friend from foe, and that if he hadn't mistaken the scurrying enemy for Bob Weeks he might have spoiled his recovery. That as may have been, the break gave Saint George's the en-

couragement needed, and she tore through the opposing line with discouraging frequency. Her gains were short, but four of them never failed to total ten yards, and she made them about anywhere she took it into her head to try. Only twice was the plunging system of advance abandoned, and then two short forward passes, made at unexpected moments, went for six and eight yards respectively. There was no doubt but that the Mount Collier line was playing high and playing too wide, but not until Pebble Stone was sent in to relieve Weeks were those faults somewhat remedied. The secondary defense was alternately supremely strong and disappointingly weak, and the ends were continually allowing themselves to be run out of the play. Just before time was up, the Blue worked a short double pass and a mud-speckled enemy went through Landreth, at left guard, for the tying score. Mount Collier found satisfaction in Saint George's fail at the try. It was the first year of the misplaced goal posts, and adding a point to a touchdown was still proving difficult.

During the intermission the spectators huddled under the stand, stamped moist feet and guessed at the outcome of the contest. Never before in the memory of the oldest boy had a Saint George's game reached half-time with any doubt remaining as to the ultimate result. There were some hard things said of the local heroes, while the drizzle hid

the world a hundred yards away, and there was a good deal of criticism aimed at Gene Hopkins. Gene's persistent effort to make good his running plays and lateral passes on a soggy field were viewed with disfavor.

Yet, when the second half started, those same tricky antics were still in evidence. Gene had been coaching the team in a pair of fake-pass plays that sent the quarter almost 'on his own' outside a drawn-in tackle, plays that looked well on paper and looked well in practice so long as the opponent didn't have much intuition, and to-day he was keen to demonstrate their efficacy. But it wasn't a day for fancy stunts, and the plays slowed up or the timing went wrong and both Weeks and Stone invariably failed to make them gain. Once, shortly after the third period was under way, Bob, back again at quarter, lost seven long yards when a Saint George's tackle refused to bite. But Bob went on testing the plays, under orders, and might have spent the rest of the afternoon doing it if Captain Way's patience hadn't become exhausted. He said they were 'out,' and said it in such a tone that Bob knew they were 'out.' But that wasn't until the Blue had made her second score.

It was a smash at the center and a sudden demoralization of the Mount Collier defense that let the Saint George's full-back go romping through. Once across the line, and finding that no one seemed especially interested in his arrival

there, he just kept on. It was Dan who finally pulled him down from behind, beating Bob to the quarry by a few yards. But that business placed Saint George's shiveringly close to the home team's goal; somewhere about the twenty-yard line, as it appeared to the spectators through a gray screen of falling water. Mount Collier met one attack nobly, but a second ripped her apart at the left of center and a muddy figure slid and stumbled to the thirteen before he was pressed into the ooze and subdued. Coach Hopkins sent in a fresh lineman and a new back, Arnould for Dabney; and the crowd shouted, '*Hold 'em!*' very earnestly. But Saint George's didn't take to being held very well. She slammed at the tackles and went to the eight, hit the center and reached the six, made a first down again by the skin of her teeth on the goal line — a foot short of it, if you must be exact; and then piled half the team over for the touchdown. But, a fact which induced a sigh of relief from the stand, she again failed, and failed badly, at the try-for-point. Thus, with the third quarter just drawing to a close, the score stood 12 to 6, and the 12 was the enemy's!

Whether or not Coach Hopkins was by this time convinced that the occasion was not one especially provided for the vindication of his precious new plays, I can't say, but certain it is that Pebble Stone tore a leaf from the enemy's book when he took charge at the start of the last

quarter and used weight instead of speed. When every momentary cessation of hostilities is seized on by all contenders to scrape their shoes free from adhering mud, speed and intricate doings are not what win games!

The contest had degenerated by now into a decidedly unscientific proceeding that might have been quite properly referred to as a wallow. Fumbles were numerous on each side, plays intended for the best accomplished the worst, signals were changed continually and Mount Collier's huddles prolonged themselves so interminably that the spectators, viewing the igloo-shaped group through the rain and the cloud of steam that arose from it, sometimes suspected that the players had fallen asleep on each other's shoulders! It became a question whether the game could be finished before darkness fell, but it continued to drag, held up by occasional penalties and the increasing substitutions by both coaches as well as by the plodding slowness of the players themselves. Mount Collier wanted very much to win that game, but, lacking dependable plays of the line-bucking variety, unable to punt with any certainty because of a heavy and slippery ball, she hardly knew how to start about it.

Bob Weeks had bad luck with his first offensive, a flat pass that, instead of reaching its objective, went into the hands of the enemy. However, the pendulum swung in the opposite direction a

minute later, for Saint George's fumbled again and Benson, substituting for Stoulson at center, fell on it. The home team took heart then and Greg Knight was delegated to carry the ball to the enemy's thirty-two yards. He didn't quite do it, although he was given an allowance of four tries, and Pop Somers arrived to claim his head-gear. Jack came on with Pop and took over Plug Graves's job. Saint George's made one first down and then was held and punted weakly to Arnould. Somehow that youth managed to keep his encrusted shoes under him long enough to come back to mid-field and Mount Collier started over again.

Jack told Captain Way that he was quite sure he could get off a decent punt if he were allowed to try and Fred asked, 'Coach want you to?' Jack acknowledged that the coach hadn't mentioned the matter; that Pop Somers had brought all the instructions; but insisted that the idea had merit. 'They're playing their safety man 'way in, Cap. Not looking for a punt at all short of third or fourth down. If we got a good one off on, say, second, and did it without putting them wise, I'll bet I could kick over that fellow's head.'

Fred Way and Bob Weeks consulted and presently the ball went back to Jack, and Jack, without advertising what was to happen, swung against it. He wasn't allowed any too much time, for an aggrieved foe came pouring down on him,

and the result wasn't all he had hoped for. Nevertheless, the ball did barely top the quarterback's upthrust hands and that youth turned and went floundering after it. The Blue-and-Russet's ends, one regular, Storey, and Myers, substituting for Wrenn, tried hard, under stern commands, to get to the ball, but only Storey made the distance, and by the time he was on hand the Saint George's safety man had captured the soggy oval and was churning his way up the field with it. But side-stepping, dodging, feinting, all the tricks known to a crafty broken-field runner, are of scant use on a rain-soaked gridiron, and Chaldron, charging down on the heels of Slim Storey, nailed him on the enemy's twenty-three yards. The audience enjoyed one of the high-lights of a now somewhat dreary contest when Storey and the foe, locked in a fierce embrace, slithered for a good six yards through a shower of mud and water.

Saint George's tried a forward that grounded, made a scant three at left tackle, and had to punt. The kicker went well back, evidently not trusting the defensive power of his line too well at this stage, and took up an uneasy position just behind his fifteen. Way and Weeks bravely intoned the time-honored injunction, 'Get through, Team! Block it! Block it!' — but it is doubtful if either of them dared hope for any such result. Yet Fortune favored the Blue-and-Russet then, for the pass from center was short — he hadn't allowed,

perhaps, for an eleven-yard toss where he was accustomed to a ten — and the kicker had to go down on his knees to get it. If he had adopted the safer course, he would have tried either to advance the ball by a head-on charge — it was a third down and not a fourth — or would have fallen on it and later tried it again. But he meant to kick, no matter what happened, and when the ball finally left his instep it smashed into the rearing body of Benson, who was a spry lad for a fairly weighty center, even on a gluey field, and pandemonium and wild confusion ensued.

The trouble was that the ball had now become in the gathering twilight about the same color as the churned-up turf, and, obscured by many legs, became a good deal like a black cat in a dark room. Dan told the crowd in Number 38 that evening that he was sure he had the ball once and only discovered his error when he tried to get arms around his own foot! After what seemed a full five minutes to the impatient Saint George's rooters, who had now abandoned the stand and were following the epic contest along the side-line, Jack stumbled against something while trying to shove a Saint George's guard out of his way, investigated, found to his surprise that it was a bobbing football, picked it up and was well past the five yards before he was apprehended. Perhaps it was as a reward of merit that Bob Weeks, usually chary with his favors where Jack was con-



JACK WENT UP IN THE AIR AND DOWN ON HIS HEAD

cerned, gave him the ball on the next play. Jack had Nick Arnould ahead of him, and Nick probably deserved at least half the credit for what followed. Anyway, Jack said so later. Nick vastly improved on a hole made by Benson and Landreth, cleaned it out nicely, in fact, and Jack ploughed through, stepping high and wide, with the water-logged ball hugged to his stomach. He got to the one-yard mark when progress stopped and he began going backward. However, the referee gave him every inch he had gained and Bob Weeks the ball once more, and Jack went up in the air and down on his head and there was a sudden din of joy from the side-line. Jack didn't hear it, for his helmet was only of leather, with no more than the usual amount of padding, and even a muddy field can be hard if you strike it violently enough.

There was no harm done, though. Jack felt a squishy sponge deluging his head — they had removed the head-gear — and wondered how much shorter his neck was and whether he would ever again be able to turn his head without bumping his chin on a shoulder. And he was aware of a thumping sort of headache. But he was quite able to watch Pop Somers try for the goal and to groan when the ball, scarcely leaving the ground, plumped into a desperately charging enemy horde.

Save for a kick-off and a run-back the contest

ended when Jack's head burrowed through the mud and found bedrock. The score was 12 to 12, and there was no getting away from that disappointing fact. From the vim that Saint George's put into their cheer one suspected that she viewed the result as something of a victory. From similar evidence one would have reached the conclusion that the eleven hoarse-voiced cheerers who had just received the ball from the referee were far from elated. The conclusion would have been absolutely correct.

CHAPTER XIII

DAN CONFESSES

JACK had the feeling that he, together with all others connected in any way with the football team, was in disgrace that Saturday evening; and this in spite of Dan's cheering assurance that he had 'made the grade.'

'I welcome you to our midst,' said Dan. 'You are now one of us, if that's any satisfaction to you. I clasp you by the hand ——'

'Keep away,' warned Jack. 'I don't know what you're talking about. Anyhow, you don't look like a fit person for a gentleman to associate with. Your face is a sight. What did they do to it, try to lift it?'

'It's far better to suffer visible and superficial scars,' replied the other darkly, 'than to sustain injuries which, while not apparent to the eye, cause lasting results. Now, getting struck on the head has been known to —— well, our asylums are full of folks who have been affected in that manner. One of the saddest cases I've ever known ——'

'Dry up! My head's all right, but your eye looks to me as though they'd taken a scalpel ——'

'Not at all. That is, I don't know what a scalpel is, unless it's a horrible-looking thing I

caught once when I was fishing for flounders as a kid, but whatever it is they didn't use it. This honorable scar is the result of a slight collision with the right elbow of the wild idiot who played left guard for our late enemy. He doesn't need a sculpin, that chap. He's got an educated elbow that ought to take him far. I expect to read in a few years that the famous surgeon, Doctor So-and-So, yesterday performed a most remarkable operation at Saint Somebody's Hospital before a large audience of prominent ——'

'Will you shut up? I want to know what you meant when you said a minute ago ——'

'Of prominent members of the medical profession. Using no instrument but his right elbow, Doctor So-and-So removed the Mongoloid hiatus from the subject with perfect success in the unprecedented time of twenty-one and four fifths seconds, establishing a new "Four A" record and beating the time of Doctor Whatshisname by three fifths of a second. The patient will be interred on Friday.'

'For goodness' sake, you don't *need* to be hit on the head! Now will you hark back and tell me what you were congratulating me for fifteen or twenty minutes ago?'

'Why not? When I said you were one of us I meant that you had passed the test and had been admitted into the inner circle of the Team. The remarkable way in which you, unassisted — save,

of course, for ten other guys — carried that ball from the fifteen yards to the goal line and there “dug in” with it entitles you to all the privileges of the Clan. Hereafter you may slap the captain on the back, swap chewing gum with the coach, and have your picture in the Lawrence game programme. It was your final feat, Jack, that did the business for you. Some fellows would have merely put the ball over the goal line, but you realized that that wasn’t sufficient. You knew that many, many times a ball honestly shoved over the line has, when reached by the referee, been found several inches short of it. So you just made up your mind, all in a flash, I dare say, that here was one occasion when the enemy wasn’t to drag you back and cheat you of a hard-earned triumph. So what did you do? I ask you what did you do?’

‘You tell it,’ said Jack, grinning.

‘Why, you bored your head so far into the ground that the other guys couldn’t stir you! You sank yourself like a concrete pier! It was feared for a while that you’d have to be extricated with a derrick, but after we’d worked you back and forth a few times you loosened and nine of us pulled you out. A great cheer arose, participated in by all save one of the anxious throng, and women sobbed aloud.’

‘You’re the biggest ass I ever listened to,’ laughed Jack. ‘And you’ve got the cheek to say that *my* brain’s woozy! Who was it didn’t cheer, though?’

'Who do you think? Come on now! You claim that your mentality is still — still unaffected. Prove it. Who would scowl fiendishly and mutter, "Curses!" through clenched teeth at seeing you justify the trouble I have expended on your football education? Hah, the poor old battered bean falters, eh?'

'Oh, you're crazy,' said Jack disgustedly. 'Who do you mean? Or are you just gabbing?'

'Why, Plug, of course!'

'Plug Graves?' Jack looked incredulous. 'You really mean you fancy he's — well, uneasy?'

'Uneasy? No, Plug doesn't get uneasy. The emotion's too — too subtle for him. He's plumb worried. I could see that in the gym after the game. Plug's wondering what's going to happen to his job if you keep on pulling spectacular stunts.'

'Oh, I fancy he won't lose sleep over it,' laughed Jack. 'I'm not in Plug's class yet. Anyway, coming back to the first of it, I'm not sure I care to be one of the — whatever you called it; the inner circle. It looks very much to me, Dan, as though being a member of the football team just now is a good deal like being a fly on a bald head.'

'You mean ——'

'I mean that there seems to me to be a distinct atmosphere of disfavor around this evening.'

'Well, you take a lot of words to say it! Unpopular, eh? Of course we are. 'Tis always so

when we ought to win and don't. It's one of the penalties of being a hero. We are heroes, you know, when we win or when we're getting ready to win. But when we lose — duck your head! But they'll forget it by to-morrow. I've already heard five perfectly good alibis for us. There'll be as many more thought of by Monday and then we'll be the Gallant Band again. So cheer up.'

'All right, but it's blamed unfair, I think. We all tried hard to win, didn't we?'

'Oh, yes, but results are what count. This, my young Britisher, is a — a practical age that we live in. You're marked 5 for endeavor and 95 for delivering the goods. But why should you worry? You were one of the bright spots, young feller. Think of Fred Way! He's captain, you see, and a captain gets all the bricks that miss the coach. And look at me. I didn't do one brilliant act all the afternoon. To be quite honest, that fellow I played against had it all over me. Don't ask me why, for I don't know.'

'He certainly had it all over your face,' agreed Jack, chuckling.

'Oh, that was their left guard. I was speaking of their tackle. Every time he and I mixed it up, I got the worst of it. I just didn't seem to be able to attain to my usual brilliant performance. Sometimes it's like that. Ah, well, I dare say even Red Grange has his off-days!'

'I fancy you played mighty well,' said Jack

loyally. 'You always do. Say, I was awfully surprised when Bob Weeks let me carry the ball that first time.'

'No more so than I. You could have knocked me down with the Woolworth Building when I saw you wiggling into the mess. I don't know what Plug or Gene said to Bob afterwards, but he probably received a severe reprimand.'

'Why? What do you mean? You don't think ——'

'Afraid I do,' answered Dan calmly. 'I strongly suspect that both Bob and Pebble have been told not to use you too much; especially when you might pull something gaudy. You see, Jack, Plug sort of feels toward that right half-back job as a New England Senator does about his seat in the Senate; sort of as if it belongs to him until death. He's had it three years; had a back-field position, anyway; and he rather hates the notion of losing it. And he doesn't intend to. And he won't, because, no matter how hard you try or how many heroic thrillers you pull off, you'll never get the first call this year. Gene will keep you on as a substitute, never doubt; he couldn't help himself if he wanted to, and he probably doesn't; and you'll get your "M. C." for playing in the Lawrence game, but you'll never be anything more than a poor little lowly sub. Not, that is, until Plug's pulled his freight to Yale or Princeton or Dartmouth, or wherever he thinks he may squeeze in.'

'Oh, I say, Dan, I can't credit that!' Jack protested. 'Maybe Plug might try to keep me off if I really threatened to push him out, which doesn't seem the least bit likely, but surely Coach Hopkins wouldn't — Well, what I mean is he wouldn't keep me off if I really *did* play a better game than — than some other fellow. I know you don't like Mr. Hopkins, Dan, but, gosh, that's a bit far-fetched, what?'

'What me no whats, young innocent. Plug's got Gene so he eats out of his hand, for all I can see. If Plug goes to Gene and says, "Here, I've worked like the dickens for the team two years" — and he really has, you know — "and now this guy Devitt's trying to horn in on my job, so just keep an eye on him, will you, like a dear old pal?" — well, take it from me, dearie, that Gene will do just so. Why he should I can't say. Except, of course, that he thinks Plug's about all right and the two are as thick as thieves. Bob Weeks, who is a good chap in every way, just decided to-day that it was a whole lot better to win the game than remember instructions. So, since you deserved your chance, he gave it to you. Twice. Now he's down at Gene's trying to explain all about it; how, in the excitement of the moment, he clean forgot!'

'How do you know he's there now?' asked Jack, still unconvinced.

'Because it's twenty-six to eight, and the

Saturday night conferences begin at seven-fifteen usually.'

'Conferences? I didn't know there were any.'

'You didn't? My poor ignoramus, the conferences are sacred gatherings held each week in spite of wind, weather, or flood-tide. They're quite impressive, too. Every one sits around in a circle and affairs of great moment are discussed with grave concern. They end up with an impassioned, get-together address by Gene during which he gets pathetic and waves the blue-and-russet banner — metaphorically, that is — until there isn't a dry eye in the audience. We all depart grim-lipped and with clenched hands, resolved to perish happily for the dear old School.'

'“We”?' asked Jack.

'Oh, yes, I used to attend, but I haven't been summoned so far this fall. I'm afraid Gene's on to me; knows I don't swallow all his guff and don't like his style of football coaching. Only the elect are asked; Plug and Dutch Chaldron and Pen Stoulson and Bob Weeks and three or four more; and Fred, because he can't quite think of an excuse for not asking the captain into conference. If Fred had any backbone he'd find something to say, but he never does.'

After a moment Jack said: 'Mother likes Mr. Hopkins rather well. He's been awfully nice to her.'

'Huh! Why wouldn't he? That's just the sort

of thing he ought to stick to. Gene's a born Rotary Club president. Or he'd make a fine Head Councilor at a Boy Scout camp. He's a quivering lump of enthusiasm and can talk a dicky-bird off a branch. He can be enthusiastic about anything on two minutes' notice and make you think his soul is in it. What he hasn't the faintest conception of is taking hold of a bunch of husky guys and turning them into a first-class football team. Jack, you can't talk fellows into winning a game; you've got to make 'em buckle down and sweat and learn what it's all about.'

'Mother says he has very nice manners,' murmured Jack innocently.

'Manners!' Dan snorted violently. 'Of course he has. He's a perfect gentleman. He's so blamed gentlemanly that it would be fatal for any one to put a custard pie in my hand when Gene was about! Hang it, Jack, you don't want gentlemen for football coaches. That is, they can *be* gentlemen, but they mustn't *act* it. Look at the man they've got at Lawrence, Landruff. He's just like the last half of his name. Those chaps down there *work*, take my word for it. They say he never played on a football team in his life, either. Used to be a track man and then was trainer at some small college for a while. Watched football and learned the practical side of it. Has a scowl that won't come off, talks out of the side of his mouth and can't say six words without busting at least

two of the nine thousand sacred rules of grammar. But when Landruff says "*Jump!*" those chaps jump!"

'Of course Mr. Hopkins isn't like that,' acknowledged Jack. 'Still, I don't see that a coach has to be a "rough-neck" to be a good man. I know that ——'

'He's got to *act* "rough-neck," though,' broke in Dan grimly. 'Fellows of seventeen and eighteen don't buckle down to work just for being asked to. They've got to be scared of some one if they're going to give their best. It's all well enough for Gene to get up on his hind legs and tell us what heroes we are and how the School is looking to us for victory and what we owe to our Alma Mater, and all that bunk. It sure does pep us up before a game, and we're likely to go in and try our hardest to win, but, if we don't happen to know what to do with the ball when we get it, or much of anything else about football, we're going to get unmercifully licked.'

'Mother had him in for tea Sunday,' said Jack demurely.

'*What!*'

'Why, yes, why not? They're neighbors, you know.'

Dan glared helplessly. 'Oh, I suppose it's all right,' he said at last in a very dubious tone. 'Still, I don't see what she finds in that "jelly-bean"! Bet you she'll get good and sick of him mighty soon.'

'She said he spoke awfully nicely about me, Dan. Said I showed a lot of promise. Had initiative, too. Said he was keeping an eye on me ——'

'Keeping an eye on her, he meant,' growled Dan. 'Say, if he thinks so much of you, why doesn't he give you a fair chance? He's a stuffed shirt, that's what he is. And, look here, Jack, it doesn't seem to me that, with your father away — well, you know how folks talk in these little burgs!'

Jack's mounting amusement exploded and Dan stared at him in surprise and annoyance. 'Well, what's so funny?' he demanded impatiently.

'You,' chuckled Jack. 'You're jealous.'

'Jealous!' echoed Dan in an outraged tone.

Jack nodded. 'Certainly,' he replied, grinning wickedly. 'You're sweet on mother. Oh, you needn't try to lie out of it. I'm accustomed to it, anyway. Most of the fellows I used to bring home in East Ogden fell in love with her. One chap sent her flowers every week, regularly. Of course, his father happened to own a greenhouse, so it wasn't much of a drain on his purse. Then there was another ——'

'Oh, shut up!' said Dan, grinning. 'Well, all right, then, I am sweet on your mother, and that's why I don't like the idea of that false alarm bothering her. Oh, I dare say he was all right once, but if he keeps on coming to tea she'll get sick to death of him.'

'You'd better speak to her about it,' said Jack gravely.

'Don't be funny. Look here, Jack, if I were ten years older I'd — I'd — only, of course, she wouldn't have me. And, besides, there's your father.'

'I was wondering if you'd remember him,' laughed Jack. 'And being ten years older than you are wouldn't quite do it, either, old man. You'd still be ten years younger than mother.'

'I would?' Dan stared incredulously, did some rapid mental calculating, and sighed. 'Gee, you'd never think she was thirty-eight!'

'Thirty-seven, but you needn't tell her I let it out. And then there's still another thing. You'd have to ask my permission, and I'm not at all certain I'd approve of you as a father. I'm awfully afraid I couldn't look up to you and respect you, Dan.'

'You are, are you? Listen to me, young feller. I'd be an old-fashioned parent and have a trunk strap handy. Oh, you'd respect me all right!'

'Ah, but I couldn't love you, Dan. You haven't a lovable face. It's too — too rugged. Now, Gene Hopkins ——'

'Oh, go to thunder! Come on over and see if Jenny's able to talk with that smashed lip of his. If you're looking for lovable faces ——'

CHAPTER XIV

'TEASERS'

THERE was a blackboard in the alcove at the gymnasium, and on it, with a piece of white chalk and a piece of blue, Mr. Hopkins made diagrams of the new plays which the team was learning. He made his symbols very carefully and neatly, and his lines curved beautifully and his lettering looked like print. The white chalk was used to indicate positions and shifts and the blue to trace the progress of the ball from center to final handler. Everything was made very plain, and a child could not have failed to understand the diagrams. Every afternoon the outdoor session was prefaced by some twenty minutes in the alcove, the players seated on a half-dozen wooden benches and Coach Hopkins standing beside the blackboard, chalk in one hand and eraser in the other. He really enjoyed addressing any sort of gathering, and did it well. The plays, frequently intricate to the point of confusion, looked simple enough as he traced them and explained them. Even out on the field, so long as they were only walked through, they went fairly well. It was when they were tried out in the scrimmage against the scrub team that the trouble began. But Gene had the virtue of extreme patience and was willing

to spend any amount of time in the perfecting of his schemes, and so ultimately the 'Fake Pass from Deep Formation' or the 'End around with Ball to Quarter through Center,' or some other high-sounding play, was made to smooth itself out.

There was plenty of grumbling about Gene's 'teasers,' but protest went no further. The coach had his staunch supporters on the squad, led by Plug Graves, and Plug was quick to talk down anything that sounded like opposition. The fact that Plug was so keen for trick plays involving deception and speed, rather than the battering, smashing qualities for which he was noted, puzzled Dan, until one evening midway between the Saint George's and Prentiss games. Plug and Ronny Landreth and Lester Wrenn were in Number 37 after study hour and they had been talking about, Dan frankly against and Plug emphatically for, the new plays. Landreth was non-committal, and Jack and Lester, together on the window-seat, were speaking in low tones of other matters. At last Dan said: 'Look here, Plug, I wish you'd tell me one thing. You're a line-smashing back. You're a heap better inside tackles than outside 'em. You can do a good bit of running when you have to, but you're not particularly shifty. Now why are you so crazy about these trick plays? They're not your meat, and you know it.'

'Now hold your horses,' answered Plug. 'Who says I'm only a line-smasher? Who besides you, I mean. I've got that reputation merely because that's the sort of stuff I've been given. That doesn't mean I'm not able to get anywhere in a broken field. Look at that run of mine last year in the Adams game; forty-seven yards from an off-tackle slide. Maybe I'm not shifty just the way Jerry is; our styles are different; but I'll bet I can get just as far as he can under similar conditions.'

'You're — you're one of the old-school guys, Dan. You can't see any good in a play that wasn't used by Walter Camp back in 1600. All you have any use for are straight bucks. Well, the old stuff's still good, but you can't win games with it alone. You've got to keep up with the times. Gene's got the right idea. Mix it up, Dan. Smash 'em and then fool 'em. Get 'em set for a thrust at center, say, and send a back off to take a lateral pass. Hide the ball as often as you can. Make 'em guess what's coming. Lots of teams lose their heads for fair after they've been fooled a few times. After that they think everything's going to be queer, and you can use straight plunges and tear 'em to bits. Surprise, uncertainty, son, that's the idea!'

'Yeah,' agreed Dan, 'I see it is. All right. I'll say Gene's supplying plenty of both. Some of these plays are just as surprising as you'd wish;

and I guess the uncertainty comes when you try to figure out what they'll get you!'

'That so? Well, they're going pretty well, aren't they? You haven't seen the scrub stopping many of them, have you?'

'I haven't seen the scrub stopping much of anything yet,' answered Dan dryly. 'If you want to spring a surprise on the scrub, all you've got to do is wave your arm and the whole back-field and both ends go tearing up the field for a forward pass. Then you walk through 'em with the ball. What goes against the scrub now won't look so smart in another fortnight.'

Dan dropped the controversy there, although Plug continued to expatiate on the superiority of craft and cunning over beef and brawn and on the advantage of suspense as a quality of attack. Dan had found the explanation he had sought, as surprising as it was. Plug Graves fancied himself as a running back! Plug sought new honors in new fields. It was, Dan told himself with grim amusement, like a bull-dog trying to chase rabbits! Plug was a whale of a line-smashing, fast-plunging back. He was even more than that; he was a fellow who, once through, could keep his feet marvelously, and, by sheer weight and fight, tear past tackle after tackle before he was brought down. But he was too heavy, too deliberate, too slow-thinking to deviate from a practically straight line. Dan recalled the run of which Plug

had boasted, and remembered that on that occasion the player had, by good fortune, crashed over a couple of the opposition close up to the line and then had been almost unchallenged for the rest of the distance. When it came to dodging and twisting, to side-stepping and feinting, Plug was a total loss. He had about as much ability for deception as a rhinoceros!

Nevertheless, it was a fact that he had been and was evidently going to be featured in the coach's trick plays to a greater extent than Jerry Dabney, his side-partner. Dan frowned. Here they were with a back-field ideally constituted for line-bucking and Gene was trying to turn it into a bunch of clowns. It wasn't as if the plays he was teaching were new and puzzling. They had all been used, some as long ago as four years, by various college teams; successful teams, to be sure, or Gene wouldn't have considered them; and no play, unless it contains some radical feature, can remain puzzling long to an averagely intelligent opponent. Dan hated to think what would happen to Gene's pet plays after Landruff, over at Lawrence, had watched them for about five minutes from the bench! Why, it was dollars to doughnuts that Landruff already knew every one of them on sight!

The next evening Dan and Jack were in the room when Greg and Lester came across from Number 38. Greg was laughing uproariously.

Lester looked grave and slightly pained, as though his companion's levity wounded him. Greg swung the door shut and gasped: 'Jenny's g-g-got a new play! He — he'll explain it t-t-to you!' He subsided into a chair then and Dan and Jack grinned invitingly. Lester said with dignity: 'The silly ass thinks there's something funny about it. There isn't. It's a perfectly wonderful play, Dan, that I've been working on for days and days. I'm going to show it to Gene to-morrow, but I thought perhaps you'd like to see it first.'

Greg choked and Dan said: 'I'm sure it's wonderful, Jenny. Won't you sit down and tell us about it?'

Lester looked at him suspiciously, but accepted the chair. He didn't sit down, however. He leaned on the back and pulled a large sheet of paper from his pocket. 'This,' he announced gravely, 'I call "End Forward and Back with Inside Half Reversing through Left Guard."'

'Fair enough,' assented Dan soberly.

'It's a play designed rather on the plan of those which Gene has been teaching us this week, only it has, I claim, one or two distinctly novel — er — features.'

'I'll say it has!' sputtered Greg. 'It's a wow!'

Lester looked at him disapprovingly before he continued. 'It is primarily intended as a scoring play from, say, the enemy's twenty to twenty-

five. It contains the requisite elements of deception and surprise.'

'Surprise? Oh, sure!' this from Gregory.

Lester unfolded the paper. On it were penned a number of circles, some letters, a few crosses, and a bewildering conglomeration of straight lines, curved lines, and wavy lines. They started from here, there, and anywhere, and led to similar places, intersecting each other most confusingly. Lester waited proudly for their praise. Dan nodded.

'Looks all right to me,' he asserted. 'How about you, Jack?'

'Rather! Perfectly corking, Jenny. Only, I say, isn't it — well, I mean to say, isn't it a bit complicated?'

Lester beamed. 'It is! That's the beauty of it, fellows. It's a play that the opposition can't possibly fathom. Complicated, yes, sir, that's what it is. Why ——'

'Go on and explain it,' begged Gregory, wiping his eyes.

'Very well. Have I your attention, fellows?' Lester's voice and manner became suddenly that of Coach Hopkins. 'I wonder if you wouldn't be able to see better, Devitt, if you moved nearer the board. Ah, yes, that's it, old chap. Now, then. We have here a play that, unlike the others I have shown you, has never yet been used. It is extremely deceptive. It depends, in fact, for its

value as a ground-gaining play on the element of surprise. It's a little thing of my own, and I think you'll agree when I've explained it that it's not so bad for a young fellow. Ha, ha!'

The others were chuckling now, for Lester had caught the coach's intonation and manner remarkably. 'Here we have the ball inside the enemy's twenty-five. We have not been doing much through his line and we know that we can't make another first down by straight rushing. We'll say that it is now third down. The referee is an Irishman with red hair wearing a number 17 shirt. The umpire is named Sneed and runs a garage in Media, Pennsylvania. There is a light breeze out of the south-southeast. The time is four-twenty-six-eighteen. One of the audience is choking on a peanut. Here we go!

'Follow me closely. Remember that deception is the first law of Nature and that a crooked line is the shortest way home. The play begins by the signal "Left formation! Hep!" Quarter stands sixteen inches to the left of center, left half goes back to a position five feet and nine inches back of the line and directly behind left tackle. Right half starts toward the bench, thinks better of it, and creates a diversion by singing the first verse of the Swedish National Anthem. Full-back stands four feet behind left half and takes off his shoe. At the starting signal right end advances to the referee' — Lester traced one of the lines on

the diagram — ‘and strikes him on the nose. Right half stops singing and cries, “Shame! Shame! Shame!” At the third word the full-back takes his shoe in his hand, runs outside right tackle — here — and tags the opposing left half on the head with it. You see, of course, that the element of surprise is strong. Right tackle and guard play the opposing left guard in. Quarter, who is to carry the ball, is provided with a sheet of brown paper and four yards of Christmas ribbon. With the aid of the left tackle he wraps the paper about the ball, ties a neat bow-knot and cries, “Messenger!” That is the signal for left half to form interference. This he does by joining arms with the quarter-back. They walk around left end, as shown by this double line, and on the way, to supply the element of deception, the left half says, “Let me carry the baby.” The quarter replies, “No, no, only its mother’s arms shall bear it, no matter how long the way.” Once past the line runner and interference increase their pace, since it is probable that the deception will be discovered at about this point. Once over the line the wrapping is removed from the ball and it is placed on the ground, the runner and his interference making an appropriate gesture and shouting in unison, “Fooled again! It’s the old Army game!”’

‘Jenny, you’re a plain nut!’ laughed Dan.

‘It — it’s a good play, just the same,’ Jack gurgled. ‘I’ll bet the coach will love it!’

'It's a wow,' declared Greg again. 'It's got it all over the stuff Gene's been showing us. I'm strong for where the guy slugs the referee!'

'Well,' grinned Jenny, crumpling up the diagram of the thrilling play and hurling it at Dan, 'you've got to acknowledge that it's rich in deception and surprise.'

'It's rich, anyway! And, to be fair, Jenny, I'll go further and say that it doesn't sound a bit foolisher than some of Gene's relics of a dead past! Just how it'll work out on the field, though ——'

'Oh, all right, if you want to crab! Come on, Greg. Let's go home. Honest, an original guy has no chance around here.'

However, he was persuaded to remain and they spent the next quarter of an hour improving on his play. 'Increasing the element of surprise,' Dan called it. Afterwards they sobered down and discussed Coach Hopkins's craze for 'teasers' seriously and with some concern. Gregory and Lester thoroughly agreed with Dan that, if the team went to Springville with nothing but the plays so far in sight, something awful would happen to them at the hands of Lawrence. Jack, still favorably impressed by the coach, refused to express an opinion. What he really thought, though, was that Dan and the others were talking from prejudice rather than judgment.

CHAPTER XV

OUTPLAYED

MOUNT COLLIER took her new plays to Bessington a few days later and tried them out on a worthy adversary. There was a distinct feeling of anxiety pervading the wearers of the blue-and-russet, and it was shared by the half-hundred fellows who accompanied them. Prentiss School was a big modern institution that occupied many acres on the outskirts of the small town up in the hills above the valley of the Connecticut River; a village in itself with all its brick dormitories and recitation halls and society houses, and its new and much-advertised gymnasium which housed an indoor running track of such fabulous size that fourteen laps equaled a mile! Prentiss had won an average of two games out of three from Mount Collier over the dozen or so years in which they had been meeting at football, and the big maroon team was held by the Blue-and-Russet in healthy respect. Since, however, Prentiss had won last year's contest, it was held at Mount Collier that it was the latter's turn for victory. There was much talk to that effect on the way over, though it had its inception less in conviction, perhaps, than in a desire to bolster courage.

For his part, Jack experienced a wave of pes-

simism the instant the thirty-odd big, capable-looking opponents romped onto the field some three minutes before the time set for the start of the game. Prentiss probably believed in psychology as an aid to victory, for it was her custom to warm up on a practice field, hidden from public view by the long bulk of the gymnasium, and at the last moment make a spectacular and impressive entry, with some five hundred supporters cheering wildly from the stand and a student band brazenly waking the echoes. It had its effect, and on an adversary in the least troubled by an inferiority complex the effect was most depressing. I don't think that Mount Collier exactly acknowledged inferiority, even to herself, but certain it is that the entrance of the dark red warriors caused an exchange of uneasy glances between her players. Almost at once Captain Way and a tall, blond-haired opponent met in mid-field, a coin spun in the weak sunlight, and, amidst a thunderous outburst of sound from the opposite side of the smooth turf, Prentiss spread to receive the kick-off.

Coach Hopkins did not undervalue his foe, and so the Blue-and-Russet's line-up presented the best he could afford: Storey, Chaldron, Landreth, Stoulson, Way, Clinton, Wrenn, Weeks, Dabney, Graves, and Knight. They looked formidable enough as they strung out across the gridiron, yet, some forty seconds later, when they faced the

opposing team at close quarters even a novice in football would have instantly proclaimed the evident superiority of the Prentiss warriors. The latter were rangy almost to a man; they had weight well carried and they were at once alert and contained in their poise; and, oh, man, couldn't they play football!

On the whole, it was rather remarkable that the visitors emerged from that hard-fought struggle as creditably as they did. They had luck rather on their side, although few Mount Collier adherents would have admitted it then, and they were beautifully stubborn in the matter of refusing to acknowledge defeat. Even when the third quarter was well along and when the score-board gave Prentiss 13 and allowed them only a naught, they were still fighting desperately. Coach Hopkins had made few changes, for his best were none too good to-day. Stone had replaced Weeks, at quarter, and Nott had taken over Dutch Chal-dron's assignment at left tackle at the start of the second half, and more recently Wyant had gone in for Plug Graves. The latter change had been made by the Mount Collier coach, not of choice, but of necessity. Prentiss, proceeding on the excellent theory that a thorn in the flesh should be plucked out, had finally plucked out Plug. Prentiss remembered the trouble the Mount Collier half had caused her last season and, to put it succinctly if vulgarly, had 'laid for him.'

Plug had expected her to, and had foiled her machinations through two full periods and part of a third. But he had been watched so closely that his endeavors had gained but little for his team. Two Prentiss youths, detailed to the job of personally conducting him whenever he emerged on their side of the line, saw to it most thoroughly that he wasn't alone for more than a moment at a time. He was used pretty roughly, but Plug could stand a lot of abuse, and not until the middle of the third period was he forced to give up. By that time he had a cut cheek, a wrenched knee, and a sprained foot. Also he looked very, very much the worse for wear all over. But he didn't look angry. Not a bit of it. Plug recognized the enemy's attentions as a tribute to his prowess as a player and accepted the result of them with a cheerful philosophy. In fact, as he limped to the bench, supported on each side by a sympathetic and rather envious substitute, he smiled his satisfaction.

Jack was surprised and not a little disappointed when Billy Wyant got Plug's position. Wyant was distinctly third-string. Save for a few minutes toward the last of the Springville High contest, when he had substituted for Dabney, Wyant hadn't seen service before. Jack liked Billy, though, and after an incredulous moment he tried very hard to be pleased at the coach's selection for Billy's sake. But it wasn't easy, and he

couldn't help wondering why he had been chosen in place of Jack Devitt. Billy did a good job of half-backing while he stayed, though; Jack owned to that. Billy was still in when, during the closing minutes of the third quarter and the opening minutes of the fourth, Prentiss made her third bid for a score.

The Maroon was master of the forward pass, while the Blue-and-Russet was not too well educated in a defense for it. Prentiss used three passes, two of them for more than twenty yards, between her own forty-six and Mount Collier's eight yards, and reached the eight without, as it seemed, having lost any of her momentum. Prentiss used some tricks, too, but she used them very sparingly. She relied largely on a nice mixture of plays outside tackles, forward passes and wide runs from kicking formation by full-back or one of the halves. Only occasionally did she reach down into her bag of tricks and pull a 'teaser.' When she did she usually made a gain with it. A small group of Mount Collier supporters half-heartedly beseeched their team to hold, but their wail was drowned by the continuous pandemonium from across the field where white-sweatered cheer-leaders to the number of eight or ten swung maroon megaphones and leaped inspiringly about at the foot of the long stand.

Yet the Blue-and-Russet did hold. No one,

probably, least of all the players, thought she could. Prentiss had scored twice, had salted her line-up with second-string players perhaps no whit inferior to those they had deposed, was confident and determined. The opponent was not in the least confident. In fact, she was as certain as might be that the enemy was coming across for a third touchdown. But she made up her several minds, it seemed, that the enemy must work for that touchdown, and work harder than she had worked for the previous ones. Prentiss smashed into Nott and gained less than two strides. Faking a kick, she tried to toss a forward, but for once Wrenn eluded the defense and hurried the throw and it grounded far from the nearest player. McGovern relieved Dan at right tackle, Coach Hopkins perhaps anticipating a switching of the attack to that side on the next play. But Prentiss sprang a surprise then; ran a bunch of backs and a right tackle to the left and knifed her quarter through center. Stoulson stopped him three yards short of the line, however, and the Maroon retired to talk the situation over while time was called for Captain Way.

Fred responded to Pete's big sponge and accompanying manipulations and decided to go on breathing a while longer. Prentiss, having apparently settled things to her satisfaction, went into a huddle, sprang to stations and massed everything she had on the Mount Collier right guard.

The idea was excellent, for Fred Way didn't look at all formidable just then as a defender of the position. But Fred was still far from dead, the secondary defense threw in behind him, Slim Storey, dashing around, hurled himself at the advancing mass and, when the whistle blew, Prentiss had missed a score by the width of a hand!

The fourth period was well started by the time Nick Arnould punted, on second down, from his twenty yards. Unfortunately, Nick's effort was short and high and Prentiss regained the ball on the thirty-seven, ran it back three and downed it much too close to the lately threatened goal for comfort. There was still plenty of time to score, and Prentiss went at her task deliberately and unhurriedly. But Fortune favored the underdog once more. A ten-yard penalty, the third inflicted on either side during the contest, set the Maroon back to the forty-four, a long down-the-field pass grounded and Prentiss punted. Pebble Stone wisely made no effort to catch, and a Prentiss end fell on the ball near the thirteen yards.

Captain Way went out and Williams took his place. Then Macomber went in for Storey and, after Greg Knight had tried an end run from kicking position and been nailed for the loss of a yard, Jack was sent in to replace Wyant. His instructions were to kick out of the hole on the next play and land the ball out of bounds as far up the

field as he could put it. After the first play Jack said his say and retired spryly to the five-yard line. Stoulson, a bit groggy from too long a session, sped the ball back badly and Jack had a sickening moment of anxiety while he juggled it, righted it, and swung his leg. It seemed to him that the whole Prentiss team was hurtling down on top of him like so many skyscrapers, but the pigskin cleared the scrimmage and went far and well, curving toward the right, passing over the head of the nearest safety back and bounding across the side line just at the middle of the field.

Twice more Jack punted out of danger during the remainder of that hectic period, and once he tried to emulate Jerry Dabney and wiggle off for a sprint. But he was brought down with a bang three yards across the scrimmage line and saw so many stars and other heavenly bodies that his head buzzed for minutes after. His following punt lacked the distance of the two preceding ones and resulted in a run-back that cut the gain in half, but since he hadn't seen the ball any too distinctly at the instant of kicking it he hadn't done so badly.

Prentiss came back strongly after every rebuff, but toward the last anxiety further to humble the foe handicapped her. Her choice of plays was not so good, and she tried desperate measures where a steady, plugging onslaught might have succeeded far better. Once Macomber endeared him-

self to the hearts of his friends by knocking a long pass squarely out of the hands of a maroon player who had sneaked far down the field for it. If that ball had reached its goal safely, Prentiss would have been celebrating another touchdown in about four seconds. In the end it was the horn that saved Mount Collier from further humiliation, for Prentiss at last stood on the visitor's six yards with four downs to go on with. But before a play could be started, the game came to an end, the score still 13 to 0.

The Prentiss captain did rather a graceful thing then. He pushed through to the bench and held his hand out to Fred Way. 'Your team put up a corking game, Captain Way,' he said heartily. 'You gave us a wonderful fight and we sure know it! I hope we'll meet again some day.'

They did, more times than once, but that doesn't belong in this story.

Mount Collier, team and supporters, returned to Westdale not ill-content with results. Defeated they had been, to be sure, but they had held a much stronger opponent, an opponent better coached and with more resources behind her, to two scores when they might very easily have had twice that many placed against them. There is always some comfort to be derived from the knowledge of a task well performed, and even in the face of defeat he who has fought his best can still hold his head high.

The players were too wearied to talk much on the way back, but later, dawdling down to the village movie palace, the occupants of Numbers 37 and 38 Upper House, reënforced by a none too presentable Jerry Dabney and a limping Billy Nott, indulged in considerable animated conversation on the subject of the afternoon game. By now they were able to forget the fact of defeat without much effort and concentrate on the details of the historic meeting, speaking at times very sternly of their individual shortcomings as well as the team's. Greg was rather bitter about the way their plays had gone. There had been gains now and then, and once a quarter-back sneak following a fake pass had eaten up twelve yards before Bob Weeks had been tossed on his head. But when the same play had been attempted a second time, after a decent lapse of time, it had been nipped in the bud and Bob had not even turned in when Nemesis overtook him.

'If we'd had some good straight stuff to fall back on when we'd showed Gene that his nifties weren't any good against a smart team, we'd have been all right,' said Greg. 'But he hasn't given us any. Great gosh, we worked that hand-pass from Jerry to Plug so often that Prentiss got sick of stopping it! Why in the dickens can't we have some good off-tackle plays to use when the fancy stuff's stalled?'

'Well, I guess Gene will see the writing on the

wall and fix us up that way,' said Jerry Dabney. 'I don't think those trick plays are at all bad, fellows, but we haven't got them down very pat yet; and then, too, Prentiss is a pretty smart team.'

'Smart? Of course she's smart,' growled Dan. 'And what about the "Aggies" and Lawrence? Don't you consider them smart, too? What sort of a showing will we make next Saturday if we start balancing corners and double-shuffling around back there with the ball instead of putting in some good hard licks at her line? Gee, they'll stop us with one hand — if they don't get too weak laughing at us! Bob Weeks made me sick to-day, and if he asks me I'll tell him so. What was the use of trying time after time to get Plug off around tackle when they were laying for him and he couldn't even get his cleats in? Dab here could have pulled some stuff while they were looking for Plug, but, no, the ball had to go to Plug every time!'

'Well, I had some chances, too,' murmured Jerry.

'How many?' demanded Dan. 'Heck, between Plug and Bob himself you and Greg might just as well have sat down and played mumbly-peg!'

'Oh, well, we didn't do so badly after all,' said Jack placatingly. 'Those fellows were awfully good.'

'No, we didn't do so badly, perhaps,' agreed

Dan, 'but I'm tired of playing on a team that's satisfied with that story. I had enough of it last season. About all the satisfaction we could get last fall was thinking how much worse we might have been licked than we were. Although, at that, it took a powerful stretch of the imagination!'

'Take my word for it,' said Lester cheerfully, 'Gene will scrap a lot of his "teasers" next Saturday and we'll do some of the old hammer-and-anvil stuff. Speed the day, say I! Who's going to lend me twenty cents? I've got a dime already.'

CHAPTER XVI

A STRANGER CALLS

THERE was no chapel on Sunday morning, and one could sleep, in consequence, a good twenty minutes later. It was wonderful what delight one could get in that added twenty minutes on the morning after a hard game, and on this particular Sunday, Dan, waking at the usual time, yawned, smiled peacefully, and drowsed with great enjoyment until Jack warned him that time was up. After breakfast, a slightly more leisurely meal than those of the week-days, the two sat on the steps of the dormitory in the somewhat pallid sunlight and gossiped with others of their kind until the newspapers arrived in a rickety Ford and they made their purchases. Upstairs, Dan started at the upper left corner of the first page and read methodically to the bottom of the last column, while Jack, having discarded all sections of his paper save the one devoted to sports, became as silent as a graven image save for an occasional suppressed exclamation of surprise or delight or dismay. On this occasion the teams he had wanted to win had won, and his exclamations were mostly approving. Mount Collier's defeat was announced in a five-line paragraph at the bottom of a page, and for once he was satisfied

with the amount of space accorded the School. Usually he felt aggrieved and threatened regularly to change his paper. Not far from the brief summary of the Westdale contest was a slightly longer dispatch from Springville stating that 'Lawrence School's veteran eleven had no trouble this afternoon in defeating the lighter team of Sheffield Academy, 26 to 9. For the victors Cummings and Danstrom starred, while Jordan, a new candidate for quarter, displayed good generalship in the second half. Lawrence scored twice in the first period, once in the second and again in the fourth. Sheffield's score came as the result of a blocked kick and a seventy-yard run by Dade in the third quarter, from which no goal was kicked, and a neat field goal by Captain Woods just before the end. To-day's game was the local school's fourth consecutive victory.'

Jack considered that a moment. Then, breaking the long silence, he said: 'Dan, did you know that Lawrence has won every game so far?'

Dan grunted, turned the pages with a rustle, and answered: 'Of course. Good team down there this year. What of it?'

'She must be a heap better than we are then.'

'Not a bit.'

'How do you figure that?'

'No better team. Better handling, that's all. Got a coach knows football from the ground up. Gene only knows upper stories. Shut up!'

‘Think we can beat her this year?’

There was no answer. Some one had discovered a prehistoric monster, or, rather, the fossil remains of one, out in Wyoming, and Dan was absorbed again in the story.

Jack laid down his paper after a while and made himself ready for church. The School Chapel, while small and designed primarily for the use of the students, could accommodate a number of the townsfolk besides, and it was Jack’s custom to walk down to Mrs. Thissel’s on Sunday forenoon and return with his mother. Then as a usual thing Dan, dressed in his most presentable suit and furbished carefully, met them outside and sat with them during the service. Afterwards Mrs. Devitt, with Jack on one side and Dan on the other, walked back to the boarding-house. Sometimes, though, Jack took Sunday dinner with his mother, and on such occasions Dan didn’t go along. He was always invited, but he realized that those extra meals went on Mrs. Devitt’s bill and he invariably declined. To-day, since Jack was to dine at Mrs. Thissel’s, Dan said good-bye on the path and went back alone to Upper House, having once more, to his chum’s disgust, refused the invitation.

‘I hope the soup’s cold and the hen burned,’ said Jack at parting. Chicken at Mount Collier was always referred to as ‘hen’ irrespective of age, sex, or other circumstances. ‘And I hope there’s salt in the ice cream!’

There remained nearly an hour before dinner, and so Dan removed his immaculate Sunday coat and, hanging his sturdy legs over an arm of the chair, went back to his paper. It was some fifteen minutes later — he placed the time at twenty minutes past twelve, since he recalled having heard the down-train whistle while he was entering the dormitory — when unfamiliar footsteps sounded in the corridor and died away in front of the partly opened door. The footsteps had been rather brisk, but with an odd rhythm, and Dan, out of sight of the person at the portal, was certain that they had been made by none of the faculty. There was a firm knock, repeated before Dan, struggling to arise, gave up the attempt and called, 'Come in!'

The caller was a stranger to Dan; a stranger, too, the boy was sure, to Westdale. He was of slightly over average height, looking taller than he perhaps was because of his thinness, had an angular, bony face that was still, in spite of the tightly drawn, weather-browed skin so deeply creased about mouth and eyes, eminently good-looking. Dan could well imagine that as a younger man, before the blue eyes had become faded and weary and trouble had graven the lines so deeply, he had been extremely handsome. Even yet there remained a glint of the gay and reckless daring in the eyes that Dan's, remembering, sought for. There was a small, somewhat

grizzled, mustache under the slightly aquiline nose, and the hair, still brown on top of the head, was graying at the temples. In age he appeared almost anything between forty and fifty, although one instinctively felt that he might be some years younger than fifty. He was dressed neatly; a gray suit, well pressed; black shoes; a soft, darker gray hat; but the apparel had been inexpensive, and the shoes and hat were no longer in their first freshness. He was smiling faintly as he pushed wider the door and crossed the sill, a smile that was at once deprecatory and eager. Then, as he made a swift survey of the room, the smile faded abruptly.

‘Perhaps I’ve made a mistake,’ said the stranger. ‘I’m looking for Devitt.’

Dan liked that voice, both for itself and for the resemblance it had to another voice that was less tired and emotionless. He was on his feet at last, smiling his friendliest.

‘This is his room, sir,’ replied Dan, ‘but he’s in the village just now.’

‘I see.’ The stranger looked about him with evident interest. ‘You’re in together. Do you look for him back soon?’

‘No, sir, not before late afternoon. Fact is, he’s dining with his mother.’ Dan saw the blue eyes flicker then. ‘You could find him at Mrs. Thissel’s house. It’s on Tanner Street; Number 12, I think, although I’m not sure that you’ll see

the number. Take the street in front of the school and then your first right. That's River. Tanner is the first you'll come to. There's a court, but you won't mistake that. Turn to your left on Tanner Street, sir, and Mrs. Thissel's is the second house on the nearer side. It's about a hundred and fifty feet from the corner.'

'Thank you. Keep along the front, you say, take the first street on the right, give a miss to the court and Tanner's the next. Right-o. Thanks awfully.'

The visitor made a slight upward motion with the right hand, rather as though he held not only the pair of old brown gloves but a cane, turned and walked the few yards to the door. Then Dan saw that one foot, the left, dragged a bit; met the floor at more of an angle than the other. The stranger faced about again, nodded with a friendly lighting of his blue eyes, and was gone. Dan listened to the oddly spaced footfalls for a moment, his face gravely frowning. Then the sound was drowned in the banging of a door and the hurrying tread of brisker feet. Dan went back to his chair, but he didn't pick up his paper again at once. He remembered that instinctive raising of the hand, the first gay motion of a flourished salute with a non-existent cane, and smiled.

'Swung a stick when he didn't need one, I dare say,' muttered Dan, 'and now, with that bum

foot, scorns to use it! So darn silly and so darn sporting!’

After a moment he arose to his feet, kicked the inoffending paper from his path, and strode to the window. ‘And that,’ he exclaimed scornfully as, hands thrust deeply into pockets, he stared at the hills, ‘is what war does!’

Under other circumstances Dan might have meandered down to Tanner Street about three o’clock, visited awhile, and walked back with Jack before supper. Or, as had happened once, there might have been a long walk for the three of them, Mrs. Devitt setting a brisk pace, with her small body well forward, her little brown brogans crunching firmly on the gravel and her stick tapping as she went. If, by chance, she forgot the stout length of blackened Scotch fir at starting out, either Jack or he must cut a stick for her before she was content to go on.

But to-day Dan knew better than to seek Jack, and so, when dinner was over and he had exhausted both his own paper and his chum’s and had written two letters, he felt rather at a loose end. The best of the afternoon had passed, and the October sunlight looked pale and thin outside. After wandering restlessly around Number 37 for a while longer, he crossed the hall and, not very hopefully, knocked on the closed portal of Number 38. He knocked softly and in code; two quick knocks and then, after a count of four, three more.

A sleepy voice called, 'Yeah? Who is it?' And then, seemingly coming from a person more widely awake, 'Come in, Danny!'

Lester was lying on his bed, a magazine open across his chest, his hands folded above it. The windows were wide open and, since the sun was on the back of the building, the room was chill. Dan went across and closed the windows and then faced the drowsy-looking youth sternly. 'That's a corking way to catch cold, you poor prune,' he said. 'Coat off, nothing over you but a scandalous magazine, and fast asleep! Don't you know that when you're asleep your pores are open and it's the easiest thing in the world ——'

'I had 'em folded,' interrupted Lester mildly.

'Had what folded?'

'My paws.'

'Horrible! If you weren't still half asleep ——
Stop it!'

'Stop what?' asked Lester aggrievedly.

'Don't you dare sneeze! If you do I'll turn you over and whale you!'

'I wasn't going to. I was going to yawn. Can't a fellow yawn in the — the privacy of his own chamber, for gosh sake?'

'Well, that's all right.' Dan sat down on the bed. 'Where's Greg?'

'Yes,' answered Lester, closing his eyes again.

'Yes! Yes, what?'

'Sir,' murmured the other.

'Idiot! Wake up! Where's your fellow wastrel?'

'What's a wastrel?' inquired Lester, momentarily interested.

'A waster. Like you and Greg. A fellow who stays up to all hours of the night roistering at moving-picture palaces and then sleeps away the glorious hours of daylight, deaf to the golden beams of the sun and the voices of the singing birds ——'

'So,' muttered Lester indistinctly, 'is your old man.'

Dan pummeled him. 'Listen, son, I came in here to be interested and amused. Get awake and be entertaining. Arise and —— Look here, I asked you where Greg is.'

'Greg?' Lester's brow furrowed with the intensity of the mental processes going on behind it. 'Oh, Greg! Why, Greg's — out.'

'You don't say! Odd I hadn't noticed it, isn't it?'

'Ouch! Let go my leg! Gee, you've got an awful grip, you blamed chump. If you must know, though I don't see what business it is of yours, Greg's attending a meeting of the C.A. And, if you want my opinion, that's where you ought to be.'

'Sounds well from a guy like you! How come Christian Association's meeting this afternoon?'

'Gabby Finlayson's away and this is something special. Roy's presiding and he's got Gene up to

give a talk. Maybe, if you get a move on, you'll be in time.'

'Huh! I hear Gene talk enough, young feller, without wasting an afternoon on him.'

'You don't hear him talk like a Christian, though,' murmured Lester, showing signs of falling off to slumber again. 'It would do you good, Dan, honest.'

'Oh, come on! Snap out of it! Let's do something. Let's go for a walk.'

Lester opened reproachful eyes. 'Walk? In my condition? Oh, Danny, you wound me! I'm a bundle of painful aches, bruises, and — and — I can't think of the other word.'

'Lies,' suggested Dan. 'If you think you're stove up you ought to see Plug! Or have you?'

'Have I what?' asked the other faintly.

'Seen Plug.' Dan tweaked his nose violently. 'He's a mess. Happy as a lark, too. He's got a crutch from somewhere and he's doing more walking around than he ever did before in his life. Joking aside, though, I think he's out of the "Aggies" game.'

Lester awoke at that news. 'Not really? What's it, his knee? He said last night that it felt rotten.'

'Knee and foot both, I guess. Oh, well, he's too proud to give a rap, so don't waste sympathy on him.'

'Who is, you silly ass? I'm sympathizing with

the team. I did want to lick the "Aggies," Dan. I suppose Gene will play Jack in Plug's place, eh?'

'Hope so. He's a better all-round man.'

Lester raised his head startledly. 'Huh?' he exclaimed.

'You heard me. I said Jack's a better all-round player than Plug. Well, isn't he? Jack can punt as well as any fellow we've got, can run like a scared rabbit, and is no slouch at hitting the line. He can pull down a pass, too, when he gets a chance, which isn't often. Plug's a one-idea fellow. He can whang into the line like a ton of bricks, but that's all he can do. He can't kick, and, although he's suddenly taken a notion that he can, he can't run for a whoop. And he doesn't know the first thing about catching passes. Now you tell one.'

But Lester looked too astonished for a moment to make any response. Finally: 'Well, gosh, I don't know about that!' he exclaimed. 'I know Jack's a rattling good back, but — well, you know, Plug —'

'Oh, sure! Plug has the reputation. Look here, Jenny, what's Plug done this year that any fairly good half-back couldn't have done?'

'Why — well, maybe he hasn't stirred himself much yet, but — How about yesterday?'

Dan shrugged. 'Did more than he should have, but only gained about twelve yards altogether. I'll own that yesterday wasn't a fair test. Those

beggars were looking after him pretty closely. But if you want the facts, Jenny, Plug's sort of resting on his laurels this fall. Think it over. Anyway, if Jack gets to start the game Saturday —— There he is now! I've got to go back. Thanks for a very entertaining visit, old dear. Go to sleep again now, you poor fish!'

CHAPTER XVII

DAN MEETS THE CAPTAIN

JACK was standing at a window, his back to the room, when Dan entered, but he turned swiftly at the sound of the door. 'Hello! Why didn't you come down?' he asked.

Dan couldn't see his face well, since the light came from behind it and the room was darkening, but he read excitement in Jack's voice.

'Well, I didn't want to butt in,' Dan replied, sprawling over the arm of a chair.

'Oh! Then you knew. Dad said you did. He was a bit the stern parent because I'd told you about him until I explained what a reliable old scout you were. Then he didn't mind.'

'And I thought I got away with it,' murmured Dan. 'Tried my best not to let on that I recognized him. And he let me think I was fooling him! Oh, well, you can't tell about those quiet chaps. Of course he would rather resent my knowing.'

'Oh, he doesn't now. Mother and I both gave you an awfully fine character, Dan. Better than you deserve, of course. But we had to lay it on a bit thick. I did think you'd be down, though. I wanted you to meet him, Dan, and he was anxious to meet you, too.'

'Thanks, but there'll be time enough, I suppose. He's not going away right off, I hope.'

'I don't know. He doesn't, either. He spoke about trying for a position here, but you know how much of a chance there'd be of that. Anyway, he's going to stay for a few days.'

'He might try down at the factory, Jack. The Grenslaw folks employ quite a bunch, and there might possibly be an office job. There'd be no harm in trying. A man named Stroud, one of the partners, lives in town, and I wouldn't be surprised if some one here knows him. Why, Doctor Allen would, of course!'

'I'm afraid there wouldn't be a likelihood of vacancies at this time of year,' answered Jack, 'but I'll suggest it to Dad.' He had been moving restlessly about, but now he came to a pause across the table and faced Dan. 'I say, what did you think of him?' he asked in a careless way that failed to disguise his eagerness.

'Well,' replied Dan consideringly, 'I thought him, as you — or he — might say, top-hole, Jack. Otherwise, a pukka sahib. Oh, I'm learning the stuff!'

'Really?' asked Jack delightedly. 'I say, I'm awfully pleased! He really is a dear old scout, Dan.' Jack's voice broke and he turned abruptly toward the window. From the seat there he added after a moment, 'How do you think he looks?'

'Why, except for a lamentable likeness to you, old son, I'd call him mighty good-looking.'

'Shut up! I mean do you think he looks — well, bad?'

'My dear idiot, I never saw your father before, and it would be absurd for me to pronounce on his — er — appearance. He certainly didn't look to me, though, like a man — who's been through so much. He looked pretty fit, I thought. Oh, thin, yes, but hard, too. And sort of tired. And that's the story.'

Jack nodded. 'Mother thinks he looks a lot better,' he said consideringly; and then, in the manner of one yielding to an optimism so far suppressed, he added: 'Yes, and so do I. He does look better, Dan. At any rate, different. And he acts different too. He — he's more even. The last time he was home he would be as jolly as you please for a while, and then he'd have a quiet spell and not say much for hours. Now he seems less — less high-spirited; doesn't joke so much; but he doesn't go off into those fits of depression the way he did. He's more natural, I fancy.'

Jack fell into silence. After a minute Dan said encouragingly, 'That's fine, isn't it?'

'You see, something — well, rather wonderful happened about a month ago,' continued Jack. 'Out there where he was working — it was Wisconsin, just as I said — they were building a new factory building. No, Dad said a storehouse.

Anyhow, one of the men who was painting it fell. Dad said it was rather awful. He came down a couple of stories, struck on a ledge or something, and then hit the ground. Dad was just a little way off, heard him yell and saw the whole thing. And then ——'

'He went flooey,' supplied Dan sympathetically.

'No, and that's the wonderful part! He didn't! He ran over and picked the man up and carried him to the hospital room. Then he stayed and helped the nurse patch him up; he wasn't as badly hurt as you'd have thought; and it wasn't until they'd hurried the chap off in an ambulance that Dad minded it. Then, he says, he felt sick. In his tummy, though, and not his head. The nurse gave him something to drink, aromatic ammonia, I think, and after a bit he was quite all right and went back to his post.'

'I see. Well, would that have affected him badly before?'

'That's just it,' answered Jack more soberly. 'You'd think so, wouldn't you? But, you see, there never was any way of telling what would do the trick. Sometimes it was the littlest thing, Dan! Dad says, though, he's pretty certain he ought to have gone off his bean when the man fell, and he thinks that because he didn't he's — well, better.'

'Of course he is. Look here, old son, isn't it perfectly possible that the whole thing — your father's trouble, I mean — is purely mental?'

'Oh, it is! That's what the doctors say.'

'All right. Then why isn't it quite likely that imagination enters into it? Suppose he's got to dread the thing; has become afraid of it; is dead sure that — that it's *got* him and that he can't help himself. I'm not explaining this very well ——'

'I see what you mean. I'm sure it's like that, Dan.'

'Very well. Then something comes along that ought to make him nutty — I beg your pardon, Jack! I'm sorry!'

'It's quite all right. It's what it amounts to while it lasts, Dan. Go on.'

'Well, I was going to say that something comes along and for once he — for once it doesn't have the usual effect on him. So what happens? Why, he begins to — to get a glimmering of an idea. Maybe the thing *isn't* inevitable, after all! Well, that sort of bucks him up, of course. He's won out once, he thinks, and so why not again? Do you see? He becomes more confident and the business doesn't weigh on his mind so heavily. Probably he forgets it entirely at times. Result is he — he works himself back to normal. Something like that. I've got the idea, but I'm no psychologist and can't put it into words very well. Anything in it, do you think?'

'A whole lot,' answered Jack emphatically. 'I believe Dad reasons it out much the same way.'

He doesn't want to talk too much about it — yet — but you can see that he's easier in his mind, Dan. I'm awfully glad you said that, because it's about the way mother and I have tried to explain it, and if you have the same idea there must surely be something in it. Wouldn't you say so?'

'Beyond the shadow of a doubt,' replied Dan gravely. 'When three giant intellects like your mother's, yours, and mine, Jack, arrive at the same conclusion, why, there's nothing left for the conclusion to do but be right!'

Jack laughed. 'About ten minutes is your limit for being serious, isn't it, you idiot?'

'Ten minutes is enough for any one to be serious,' returned Dan lightly. 'However, if you crave another session of gravity I'll help you to it. So far as next Saturday's game is concerned, Plug Graves is sunk. That means that you'll most probably get the job, and those "Aggie" freshmen are a husky lot, old son, with muscles hardened by months of ploughing and — and whatever else it is agricultural students are required to do. Horny-handed sons of toil are what they are, Jack.'

'Not really?' exclaimed his audience with evident uneasiness.

'Not really what?'

'They don't really do any ploughing, Dan?'

'No, as a matter of fact, they don't. Between you and me, Jack, I don't suppose one of them

would know what a plough was if it was shown to him. He'd probably think it a vacuum cleaner. On graduation ninety-seven out of every hundred become bond salesmen and the other three teach agriculture to a new crop of husbandmen. Just the same, the S.A.C. freshies aren't to be held in contempt. They generally beat us, although I believe that history records one tie. So, if you crave seriousness, here's your chance. Think what's going to happen to you Saturday when five or six "Aggie" players settle simultaneously on your vertebrae!

'Yes, all right,' said Jack eagerly, 'but do you really think Gene will put me in? To start, I mean?'

Dan shrugged. 'Well, he could start Arnould, but as Nick will probably be needed later to replace Jerry, I don't see the philosophy of that. And, of course, there's Wyant, but Billy's not especially able. Yes, I think you may safely assume that you'll get your full share of honors and hard knocks come Saturday. Try that on your flute!'

That Dan's prediction of Plug Graves's absence from the game with the State Agricultural College freshmen would prove true was indicated on Monday. Plug wasn't even on the field, and Hal Laidlaw was authority for the announcement that they had taken Plug's crutch away from him and put him to bed. Another indication was sup-

plied by Coach Hopkins's suddenly awakened interest in Jack. So far Gene had been cordial enough, in a social way, but if he had considered Jack of much importance as a football player he had thoroughly concealed the fact. To-day, though, there was a distinct change in his attitude. Although Jack had seen service on Saturday, he was not exempted to-day from actual work. He was sent in with the substitute team and made to practice formations and signals until he wondered whether, by any chance, the coach was trying to kill him off to make room for Wyant. Even dummy tackling was included in his duties, and, while Gene didn't actually keep an eye on him all the time, Jack had the impression that the coach wasn't missing any of his performance. To end as grueling a session as the boy had ever taken part in, he was sent down the field to where three other kickers were at work and sent off a dozen punts as darkness threatened.

He was so tired after supper that Dan half expected he would fall asleep before they reached Mrs. Thissel's. Jack had insisted on Dan's going there with him last evening, but Dan had refused and Jack had finally gone off alone, a trifle impatient with his chum. Dan had wanted to go, too, but something had made him stubborn. Perhaps he had realized afterwards what that something was, but if so he had refused to acknowledge it.

They didn't have much time to spend with Captain and Mrs. Devitt, for Faculty was rather strict about having fellows back in the dormitories for study hour, but they were there long enough for Dan to become quite well acquainted with Jack's father and to fall a victim to his charm. Once Dan caught himself marveling at the fact that, if he hadn't known the Captain's story beforehand, he would never have suspected it. Save that he looked curiously tired when his face was in repose, Captain Devitt suggested nothing tragic. He was fond of fun, liked to 'rag' Mrs. Devitt and Jack with a serious and apparently innocent countenance, and laughed heartily if quietly over one or two of Dan's exaggerations. The latter noticed that his hands, thin and long and bony, showed evidence of labor. The nails were sometimes broken and, doubtless in spite of every effort, still showed the stains of former grime. But otherwise the Captain was immaculate, and Dan was careful not to look a second time at his hands lest the other see and surmise a criticism. Once he said: 'You might drop the "Captain," Dan. That's all over with, you know. Just "Devitt" will do.' But Dan couldn't bring himself to addressing the other without the prefix of 'Mister'; and, anyhow, he liked the title of 'Captain,' and, since Mrs. Devitt, while calling her husband Dick when speaking to him, always referred to him as 'the Captain' at other times, Dan didn't heed the suggestion.

The visitor had feared that conversation might be difficult, fearing that he would inadvertently touch on some forbidden subject, but it wasn't. The Captain spoke once or twice frankly and without embarrassment of his experiences in the West, and Dan breathed more freely. The school, the masters, and football formed a considerable part of the talk. The Captain was much interested in American football. He had, he told Dan, seen several matches, but, while he had enjoyed watching them, his ignorance of the game had hampered him. Dan suggested that he come up to the field some afternoon and sit on the bench. 'If neither Jack nor I is idle, I'll deputize one of the subs to explain the stuff, sir. We are going to have a really tight game on Saturday. You oughtn't to miss that. I've tried to get Mrs. Devitt to come up for a game, but she won't.'

Mrs. Devitt shook her head and smiled above her embroidery. 'I can stand Jack playing football, Dick, so long as I don't have to watch him, but I'm certain that I'd scream horribly and run right out on the field if I saw him get hurt! And I'm afraid he wouldn't like that too well!'

'I'll bet the rest of the fellows would,' laughed Dan.

It was Jack who presently brought up the subject of employment and repeated what Dan had suggested as to the metal box factory. 'He thinks, Dad, that perhaps Doctor Allen — he's

the Principal, you know — would give you a letter to one of the firm here.'

'Very nice of him, of course,' said the Captain, 'but I don't happen to know your Principal, dear lad.'

'No, but I know him. That is, he knows me! And Dan's been to dinner at his house. Dan thinks that if we told him what was wanted he'd be glad to — to do what he could. Of course, there mightn't be any position open just now, though.'

'Worth trying,' replied Captain Devitt thoughtfully. 'Though I must say, Jack, that it's rather a tall order for your Head Master to recommend a chap he doesn't know, what? But we'll think about it. After all, it may be wiser for me to try a larger place. There's Springville, Jack tells me.' The Captain turned an inquiring gaze to Dan.

'Yes, sir, there are likely to be more chances there, of course. But — but I do wish you'd try this place first. You see, if you found something here, sir, you wouldn't have to — that is, you'd be able to stay here with Jack and — and Mrs. Devitt.'

'Yes, that would be a bit of luck, wouldn't it, Old Girl?' said the Captain.

Mrs. Devitt smiled softly, but in another moment she had shrugged her small shoulders and was saying pertly: 'Oh, would it, though? I'm not so certain that I want a husband around just

now. As an unattached female, Dick, I've been doing quite well, haven't I, Jack? I've a fair lot of admirers, if you must know. There's the dear old gentleman who runs the grocery and the nice boy who has the garage and the agent at the railway station and the adorable Mr. Hopkins! And there are others, too, heaps of others. Ask Dan if you don't believe me!

Dan wished he hadn't to blush just then; wished the next instant that he had had sense enough not to glance at Jack, for Jack was grinning broadly, knowingly! Gosh, he hoped the Captain hadn't noticed anything!

CHAPTER XVIII

A NEW STAR APPEARS

IT rained on Tuesday, and Coach Hopkins kept the squad in the gymnasium for the better part of an hour before introducing them to a wet and slippery practice gridiron. The coach found much to say. He liked to talk, appeared to enjoy the sound of his own very pleasant voice immensely. This afternoon he went back to the beginning of football time and traced the development of the game through all its various ages. Some of the audience were frankly bored, but most of them, more than willing to trade the chill wetness of a pool-gemmed field for the shelter and comparative warmth of the gymnasium alcove, received the lecture in good part. As a matter of fact, to any one interested in football Coach Hopkins's talk was really interesting, and even Dan, could he have convinced himself that it was enhancing the prospect of a victory over Lawrence, would have enjoyed it. Perhaps the coach intended to reach contemporary football before he was through and so bring the homily to a practical conclusion, but, becoming absorbed in his subject, he spent so much time on the history of the sport that he never got down to the matter of present-day playing at all. A delicate cough and a meaning

display of his watch by Manager Laidlaw interrupted the flow of eloquence and the squad *squish-squashed* out to perfect themselves in handling a wet ball.

There were murmurs of dissatisfaction heard that week. Pessimistic youths pointed to the fact that the team had failed to win the last two contests and was due to lose a third in a few days, and asked why. A number of explanations were offered, the favorite one concerning the coach. It was indicated that he meant well, but that his methods were not practical: that he placed too high a value on strategy as opposed to force; that, in short, if he didn't very quickly develop an attack that could gain ground longitudinally as well as laterally, he would find himself mentor of one of the least successful Mount Collier teams of all time!

The dissatisfaction was not confined to the non-combatants, either. One heard it even in the ranks of the warriors, although there it was more guarded and was restricted to a minority. Yet it showed signs of growth as the days passed and as it became more and more evident that the team was to line up against the 'Aggies' with much the same repertoire it had used in the last two contests. Coach Hopkins worked hard himself and made the squad work hard, but, save that there was a renewed emphasis on tackling and handling the ball cleanly, practice proceeded about as be-

fore. Five of the trick plays were hammered at day after day and the team became fairly adept in execution. Sometimes, when the plays went smoothly and nicely against the scrub, Dan wondered if events were to prove Gene right and him wrong. They were such pretty things, those plays, that he would have liked to believe in them. Then remembering that on Tuesday the adversary they were to meet had held its own varsity team to one score, pessimism returned.

Captain Way's position was difficult just now. He was the recipient of protests and objections from the disgruntled ones and was himself none too well pleased with the team's progress and prospects. Yet his faith in the coach continued and he went on hoping for the best and trying to placate the complainers with vague promises of ultimate results. Fred was a nice fellow and extremely popular, facts to which he largely owed his elevation to the captaincy. He was a good lineman, although Dan, who was playing his second season beside him, knew very well that he was no wonder as a guard. One trouble with Fred was that he was what Dan called 'flabby.' Not physically, for he was as hard as nails and as tough as rope that way; a tall, well-built chap with a finely developed body, plenty of endurance, and a lot of speed. But he was essentially easy-going. He wouldn't have done an injury to another fellow for the world, but, on the other hand,

it is doubtful if he would have bestirred himself greatly to perform a benefit. He was kind-hearted and good-natured; and you could talk him around the compass if you had the gift of the gab. And Gene Hopkins had it. Like most too amiable fellows, he was easily flattered, and at that Gene was past-master. And, which may sound contradictory but isn't, he had a streak of obstinacy in him.

Dan had had several talks with Fred about the way team affairs were going, and the captain, who held Dan in high regard as a friend and high respect as a player, had listened cordially. He had even agreed with some of Dan's premises; such as that Gene wasn't paying enough attention to groundwork, that more straight plays were needed, and that something ought to be done if they didn't want to go through another season as disastrous as last, or more so. But Fred wasn't one for action in the circumstances. He replied that Gene seemed to know what he was doing, even if it did look queer to them; that he guessed there was a good deal in the coach's contention that surprise was half the battle, and that he believed that when the team got into its swing everything would be all right. And at that Dan was forced to leave it, for insistence might easily have aroused Fred's stubbornness and that Dan wanted to avoid.

Plug Graves returned to the field on Wednes-

day, hobbling cheerfully about with the aid of a cane. He had, he explained, spent two days in the infirmary and had a whale of a time. But you got pretty sick of being coddled after a while, and so he had talked turkey and they had let him go. It wasn't his knee that was keeping him out of the game, it was his foot. Some lummoX of a Prentiss guy had landed on it and put half his toes on the blink. But he'd be all right by Saturday. Sure! Huh! Gene needn't think he could keep him on the bench Saturday! He had a score to settle with those 'Aggie' players, after the way they'd acted last year. This time they'd go home with their tails between their legs, by gorry!

Overhearing some of this talk, Jack experienced disappointment. If Plug really wanted to play on Saturday and made up his mind to it, Jack guessed he would do it. Dan maintained that Plug and Coach Hopkins were as thick as glue, and that so long as Plug claimed the right half-back position no one else had much of a chance; and Jack was beginning to believe it. Plug was always exceedingly affable, even jovial, with Jack. If he felt any uneasiness over the latter's success as a back, he certainly didn't show it. Probably, though, Plug was not yet able to conceive of a serious rival for his position. Sometimes he jokingly hailed Jack as 'The Mystery,' adding, usually, words to the effect that he was still on his trail. Once he called across the locker

room: 'Say, Devitt, I almost had you last night. I was just on the verge of remembering where I'd seen you before when Fish, silly ass, dropped a book!' Jack's murmured reply was unintelligible.

On Thursday evening Captain Devitt had a surprise for Jack and Dan when they went down to Mrs. Thissel's for a brief visit after supper. The Captain, without the assistance of Doctor Allen or any one else, had, it turned out, secured a position at the factory across the river. 'It's not much, you know,' the Captain explained cheerfully, 'but I'm jolly glad to get it. Rather be outdoors, of course, but they hadn't any outside jobs vacant. I ——' He paused and glanced briefly and speculatively at Dan. 'I wanted to lay my cards on the table and tell them how it is with me, you know; that I might go bad on their hands sometime, and all that, but I flunked it, Jack. Rotten cowardly, I suppose.'

'It wasn't,' declared Jack. 'Anyway, you oughtn't to — to think about *that*, you know!' | 'Oh, quite so, laddie. Only mentioned it, you know. Thought it would have been a bit straighter, what? How's the jolly old football coming on, Dan?'

'Perfectly rotten, thanks, Captain. We're going to do card tricks and legerdemain Saturday. You see, the idea is to distract the other fellow's attention and then, when he's sort of cross-eyed and woozy from watching us, slip the ball over on

him. It may work. The coach seems to think so. But some of us have our doubts.'

'They'll beat us in any case,' said Jack. 'Every one says so.'

'For once every one's about right then,' Dan agreed. 'If we score with what we've got to do it with, we'll be plumb lucky!'

'Are you going to play, Jack?' asked Mrs. Devitt. Her voice didn't suggest uneasiness, but Dan was certain that she'd have been well content had Jack answered in the negative. What Jack did say was that he didn't know.

'I thought I was going to get Plug Graves's place,' he elaborated, 'but now Plug says he's going to play himself, if it kills him, and so I don't know just how it'll come out. I'll probably get in for a while, though.'

Plug arrived on the field in his togs on Friday and started trotting around with the first team, with a watchful trainer dogging his footsteps. He lasted some three minutes and then, led by Tim McRaig and uttering disgusted sentiments, limped back to the bench. Jack, glimpsing the defeat from across the field, where he was working out with the substitutes, tried not to feel glad, but he didn't succeed. Later, it was noised around that Timmy had forbidden Plug from appearing in togs again before the middle of next week and that, for once, Gene had refused to listen to Plug's demands.

So, when Saturday arrived, and with it the husky team of freshies from the up-State college, it was Jack who shared the half-back assignments with Jerry Dabney. Nature did all she could for the contestants, providing a dry but springy sod, a warm sun and a light westerly breeze, but it wasn't enough for Mount Collier. The Blue-and-Russet was beaten and beaten rather badly, although, all things considered, she might have done worse.

'Aggie' was a strong team. She had been thoroughly trained and intelligently coached. She had brawn and brain, too, and that is a difficult combination to win from. She knew fewer plays than her opponent, or, at least, she used fewer, but what she got along with were particularly good, each of its kind. If she didn't put much emphasis on surprise, she surely did on variety, and during the first two periods a bewildered Mount Collier defense seldom knew what was coming at it. If it set itself for a play between tackles, an end run came. If it prepared to support the wings, a long-legged full-back smashed through Pen Stoulson. If it scattered back for a forward pass, the play hit the line. Even the enemy's punts were sprung at unorthodox times!

Later, the Blue-and-Russet grew more astute and was able to fathom the adversary's intentions fairly frequently, but fathoming them didn't necessarily mean stopping them, and by the time

the third period was at an end 'Aggie' had run up the nice total of 27 points. As for Mr. Hopkins's favorite plays — well, they just didn't seem to puzzle the enemy a mite. Perhaps, though, this was largely because they seldom got going well before the enemy sifted through and smeared them. All of them depended on a line that could get under way fast and hard, and against the Agricultural College freshmen the home team line couldn't. Once, to be sure, Arnould, who had replaced Dabney, got away for twenty-six yards; and then, at the start of the fourth quarter, there was Jack's gorgeous amble from the home team's forty-one to the enemy's nineteen. But those were merely two high-lights on an otherwise drab canvas, performances never again duplicated.

Jack achieved fame that afternoon if the team, as a whole, didn't. He not only filled Plug Graves's shoes, but he used them as Plug had never done; or, certainly, never the present season. He used them to punt with, to run with. He used them a deal more expertly than their owner had used them and to better effect. In brief, Jack was as close to a sensation as the contest developed, and received more cheering than the rest of his team together. He showed himself a hard, fast, plucky back with a head on his shoulders and, metaphorically at least, wings on his feet! He scored no points, but his forty-yard sprint through a territory liberally sprinkled with inimical opponents

paved the way for the only success of his team. That scamper left the ball just inside 'Aggie's' twenty-yards, and, after Pebble Stone had given one try to Coach Hopkins's treasured forward-pass feint that was planned to let a back through outside tackle — and on this occasion didn't — and after Somers had barely regained the yard and a half lost by the previous play, Pebble knelt and took the ball from center, cocked it cleverly, and shut his eyes. Pop Somers did the rest, lifting the pigskin over the bars with one of the longest place-kicks for goal in the Mount Collier records. The supporters of the Blue-and-Russet cheered long and gratefully, thankful for small mercies and, not many minutes later, the contest came to an end. Score; 'Aggies' 27; Mount Collier 3.

Jack got a 'hand' when he entered the dining-room in Upper House that evening and, failing to realize for a moment that he was being complimented, amused the applauders by his efforts to discover the cause of the outburst. Greg pulled him into a seat with: 'Mustn't overdo it, you know. That startled fawn stuff goes big, but it should be used with discretion.'

Fred Way was waiting for Dan in the corridor after supper and spirited him away to a corner. Jack thought Fred looked rather worried, but it was none of his business, and so he dawdled upstairs alone. Ten minutes later Dan came in,

grinning the way he grinned when mischief was afoot. Jack eyed him suspiciously.

'You're up to something,' he charged sternly.

Dan chuckled. 'On the contrary, I'm down to something. I'm down to butting in where I'm not wanted, old son.' Jack looked satisfyingly puzzled and Dan went on. 'Fred's in a stew and wants me to go to Gene's with him. I explained that Gene hadn't asked me to the conference, but he said that that was all right, that he was inviting me and that he guessed he had a right to take any one he wanted to. Old Fred's got his fight up. Or, at least, his stubbornness, and in his case it's much the same thing. You going down to-night?'

'I don't know. Yes, I suppose so, if you're going to be tied up.'

'Oh, I won't be long, I guess. You come down with Fred and me, and after the show's over I'll go upstairs and fetch you back. I dare say you know that you're the cause of the commotion.'

'I? What commotion?'

'Well, maybe there won't be any commotion, but there's a possibility of it. About half the School have been asking Fred whose place you'll get in the back-field and Fred doesn't know!'

'Oh, rot! I'm not looking for any one's job, Dan.'

'Aren't you? Well, after the way you showed-off this afternoon you'll get some one's job if the School has its say. You're the fair-haired boy now,

little one, and it behooves you to slick your scalp-lock down and look the part. Fred is quite positive he's going to get you on the team, but I'm not. By the time we get down to Gene's and Gene has said a few soothing words, he will have lost all his grit. However, maybe something snappy will happen, and I want to be there.'

'Tell Fred not to bother about me, please,' said Jack.

'Oh, he probably won't when the time comes,' replied Dan lightly. 'But it isn't Fred that's bothering so much. It's the jolly old Vox Populi; the Man in the Street, Public Opinion, and all that bunch. You've made a swanking hero of yourself, Jack, and the dear old School is all for you and won't stop howling until Gene has found a place for you. Of course what most of them are hoping is that he will shelve Plug, for Plug isn't exactly an idol here, but I can't see Gene doing it. And as Jerry Dabney is too good a man to lose and Greg is the big noise on defense, why, it looks to me as if Gene was in a tight place. And that's why I expect to spend a most enjoyable and edifying half-hour. Get your cap and come on.'

CHAPTER XIX

PLUG GRAVES REMEMBERS

BUT Dan was doomed to disappointment. He told Jack about the meeting as they made their way back to school just before ten. 'Of course, when the time came,' he said disgustedly, 'Fred didn't have the nerve to say a thing. Your name wasn't mentioned save twice, and then only in connection with the plays. G  ne still insists that his *chef d'  uvres* are all to the good and that by the time we run up against Adams next week they'll be working like charms. He's making me quite sick, Jack. For two cents I'd quit the firm. I might do it for one. There's no satisfaction in playing on a team that loses everything!'

'But I'd think he could see with his own eyes that his stuff doesn't go for a hang!'

'Oh, he has enough explanations to drive you batty! Last week we hadn't perfected the plays. This week we were up against a far superior team. (He isn't sure that we ought to play college freshmen.) Next week it'll be something else. Oh, well, we're bound to beat Hilliard after that, and maybe that'll be glory enough for one season. Won three, tied one, and lost four! It doesn't sound like much unless you say it fast!'

'Why don't the fellows tell him straight out

that they can't win on those tricky plays? Why not insist on having some good smashing stuff?'

'Well, I suppose the main reason is that Gene's got the outfit pretty well hypnotized. Oh, there are some of us who don't fall for his guff, but we're too few to make much of a dent. To-night he hadn't a fellow there, except me, who wasn't ready to lie down and play dead at the word. Plug puts in his oar all the time and the rest of the bunch are just so many "yes-men." If Fred Way had the courage of a sick duck, he'd stand up and say, "Nix on the fluff, Gene. Give us something to chew on!" But Fred just swallows anything Gene tells him. Well, we'll wait and see what happens now. There's going to be a big howl if he doesn't give you a lead in his show, and that's no idle dream!'

'Well, I don't see that it makes so much difference,' remarked Jack, 'whether he calls me a first-string back or a second, so long as I get into the games.'

'In effect it doesn't, of course, but, you see, there's the principle of the thing. If a fellow makes good, he's got a right to his reward, and you have made good, son. You've played bang-up football ever since you started here. And the School knows it and isn't going to be satisfied unless Gene gives you — er — recognition. He got off some vague stuff to-night about the ideal team

being composed, not of eleven men, but of twenty-two or thirty-three. Hinted that because a fellow started a game it was no sign he was better than the guy who followed him. Listened well, and the bunch sat there and tried to look intelligent and nodded their silly heads. I can tell you one thing, though, Jack. Plug isn't feeling as easy as he tried to look to-night. It's got through his thick skull at last that he's on pretty thin ice. He hasn't been doing so blamed well this fall, and now that he's missed one game and will be out of practice until, maybe, Wednesday, he's trying to do some thinking. It would be a frightful kick in the shins for him if he got set back to a first sub's job, and if I wasn't pretty hard-boiled I'd feel sorry for him!'

'I don't believe I'd want to oust him, Dan.'

'Whether you do or don't isn't for you to say, dearie. That's up to the coach.'

'I know. But doesn't the captain have any say about such things, Dan?'

'Not at this school,' was the grim reply.

Dan was not in error about the effect on Plug's complacency of Jack's performance in the 'Aggie' game. Plug was distinctly uneasy. Of course, he told himself, it wasn't really likely that Gene would have the nerve to put Devitt ahead of him. Maybe he hadn't been playing quite as well as last year, but, shucks, why should he? No use running yourself ragged in those unimportant

games; do your fair share and let some other guy set off the fireworks. Then, when the big games came along, you were in shape to show your real speed. He had, he reflected, rather overdone things in the Prentiss fracas; had been an ass to take so much punishment and get a lay-off that wasn't doing him a bit of good. Another time he wouldn't be so blamed ambitious! He had meant to have a chat with Gene last night at the conference, but he had arrived too late and then, afterwards, Bob Weeks had dragged him away. Well, maybe it wouldn't be such a bad idea to drop in on the coach before church this morning and make certain that he wasn't entertaining any silly notions.

So Plug sallied down to the little white house on Tanner Street after breakfast and a brief survey of the sporting page in the Sunday newspaper and found Mr. Hopkins there in his bathrobe. He seemed a trifle surprised to see his caller, but was as hearty and jovial as though really pleased. Nevertheless, it's not the part of wisdom to present problems to a man too lately out of bed, and Plug found scant surcease for his uneasiness in that interview.

He brought up the subject of Jack Devitt casually and smilingly and the coach frowned a little as he spread a liberal supply of jam on a portion of bread. 'I'm glad you spoke of Devitt,' he announced in a thoughtful manner. 'I dare

say you know he's made quite a hit with his fellows, Plug.'

'Sure! He played good ball yesterday. Of course he'd never got started that time if his interference hadn't been perfect, though.'

'That's true of any good piece of running, isn't it? But, aside from that, old man, Devitt was a mighty useful chap in other ways. Those kicks of his were remarkable. Fact is, you see, he's triple-threat, and we haven't many such on the team. The School has taken to him, very naturally, and we've got to look after him. Besides, we need him, Plug.'

Plug looked a bit more uneasy and a trifle annoyed as well. 'Of course! He's good. No one's saying he isn't. Only we can't play twelve fellows, and if we don't, what can we do for him? We couldn't spare a guy that's as corking an open-field runner as Jerry Dabney and we certainly can't do without Greg Knight. Well, there's my job, but I suppose I'd have a good right to kick if he was handed that!' Plug smiled easily. 'After all, Gene, what's wrong with letting Devitt sit pretty just where he is? He's just as much use as a first substitute, isn't he? He's always there when we need him.'

The coach nodded. 'Oh, yes, I'm not seriously considering any present changes. After you get back I dare say you'll make up for lost time and show something of your old stuff, Plug. You

know, of course' — he smiled somewhat archly — 'you really haven't been humping yourself very much this season, old chap. Oh, not that I'm criticizing. I know what you can do when you want to, Plug. Only — well, with this Devitt chap making the sort of showing he is, it wouldn't be a bad scheme for you to pull a little of the spectacular stuff. See what I mean, eh? We've got to show the crowd that we're not — well, not playing favorites. You ought to be ready to do pretty well against Adams next Saturday, and if you pull some of the last season stunts we won't have the School setting up a roar.'

'You mean I've got to beat Devitt for the job, eh?' demanded Plug resentfully. 'Like fun I have! Look here, Gene, I've earned that place and I mean to keep it. What's the idea, making out like I'm a "greeny"?''

'My dear chap,' the coach expostulated, 'don't fly off the handle! I'm only saying — pointing out to you that the School is expecting me to do something for Devitt after yesterday's showing, and you can surely see the difficulty I'm in. I want him and mean to use him, but he's just as good for my purpose if he's a substitute; better, for a fellow works harder when there's something he hasn't got. After all, as I said last night to you chaps, this business of calling eleven fellows first-choice and the rest second or third doesn't amount to much. As a matter of fact, many a second- or

third-string player has counted more in a victory than the starter. All I want you to do is make it a lot easier for me by getting back to your true form, Plug. As it is now' — the coach shrugged and smiled disarmingly — 'well, there's an element in the School which thinks you aren't holding down your job.'

'I guess it's pretty small,' said Plug. 'Some fellows don't like me because I won't cater to 'em, that's all. They're born knockers, anyhow. Oh, all right, I get your idea. I haven't been pulling the fireworks stuff because what's it get you? I mean if you have your reputation already, you might as well leave that to the others. Give 'em a chance, see?'

'Of course, yes, but don't lose sight of the fact that if you've established a reputation as a star player, Plug, the public expects you to deliver the goods right along. If you let down, it says you're loafing, or that you never did have so much after all. See? Fame, Plug, entails its duties. In fact' — and Mr. Hopkins chuckled as though congratulating himself on having originated something pretty neat — 'it's more difficult to live up to a reputation than it is to earn it!'

'Sure,' agreed Plug carelessly. 'That's a fact, Gene. Well, I'll be getting back for church. Say, I thought we were going to have trouble with Fred last night. Notice how glum he looked?' Plug chuckled. 'Bet you some one went and reminded him he was captain!'

'As, of course, he is,' observed the coach gravely.

'Oh, sure!' Plug agreed, grinning broadly. 'And a mighty good one, if you ask me. Never knew a captain who gave less trouble! Well, see you tomorrow, Coach.'

'How's the foot coming along?' asked Mr. Hopkins as he politely accompanied the caller to the door.

'Plaguy slow,' grumbled Plug. 'But I guess it'll be all right in two or three days. I keep my weight off it as much as I can. Have to walk like a wooden-legged sailor, though. Timmy's got my toes so I can't even wiggle 'em!' He opened the door. As he did so three persons passed in the hallway on their way outside. Plug remained motionless, staring after them until they had vanished through the front door. Then he turned abruptly to the coach.

'Who was that man?' he asked eagerly.

'Captain Devitt. Jack Devitt's father.'

'His father!' muttered Plug.

'Came a few days ago. I understand he's going to remain here for the winter. He seems a very decent fellow.'

'Oh, boy!' murmured Plug. 'Devitt's old man, eh? Of course!'

'You know him, then?' asked Mr. Hopkins, gently urging his caller into the hall. Plug smiled oddly and winked.

'Well, no, but you might say I'd met him,

Gene!' He laughed as though at an excellent joke and hurried as well as his bad foot would let him after the trio. He didn't try to overtake them, but all the way to the Chapel he kept them in sight, and when Captain and Mrs. Devitt and Jack, joined by Dan, took their seats, he pushed himself into an already well-occupied pew across the aisle from where he could watch them.

I don't think Plug heard much of the Doctor's sermon. He was far too busy with his own thoughts. By the time the service was over, he had formulated what appeared to him a very brilliant plan, and at the dinner table he set about its execution. 'Jack,' he called from the next table, 'see me after dinner, will you?' Plug made it a rule to call every fellow by his first name, no matter how slight their acquaintance might be. 'Got a word for you from the coach. Look here, mind coming up to the room a minute?'

'No, I'll come up right after,' answered Jack. He wondered what the coach's message might be, and, especially, why Plug Graves had been chosen as its bearer. Perhaps — but no, it couldn't be anything important. Then he turned to see Dan frowning in a puzzled way at his well-filled plate. It *was* funny, thought Jack, that Plug should have brought Gene's message.

Dan was evidently intensely curious, but he said little when they went back upstairs, and only 'Get Fish to show you his worms,' when Jack

started back, after a brief interval, for the floor below. The door of Number 20 was wide open and Plug and Fishgill were both in. But Plug said carelessly, 'Make yourself scarce for a few minutes, Fish: this is football stuff' — and Fish, a queer-looking chap with inquiring, squinted eyes looking from a kindly countenance, went instantly. The door closed, and Jack was aware of an odor, not unpleasant but slightly pungent and suggestive of the dim rear part of Mr. Stiles's drug store back in East Ogden, where the prescriptions were put up.

'Sit down, Jack,' said Plug heartily when they were alone. 'I got to thinking in Chapel this morning about where you and I had met before, old man. You know a church is a swell place to think in. Well, sir, it all came back to me like a flash.'

Jack's eyes widened perceptibly and his mouth stiffened.

'Yes, Jack, just like a flash,' continued Plug, thrusting his hands into his pockets and leaning back to observe the other with evident enjoyment. 'So, as I thought you'd like to hear all about it, I asked you up. What's the matter? Chair uncomfortable?'

CHAPTER XX

THE TEAM LOSES A PLAYER

JACK came downstairs again some twenty minutes later, and Dan asked, 'Well, what's the big news?'

'News? Oh, nothing.' Jack seemed in the best of spirits. 'That is, Gene sent word that I did a good job of playing yesterday.'

'You don't tell me! Wonder where he found that out. Wasn't in the paper, as far as I read. What else?'

'What else what?' asked Jack innocently.

'Well, it didn't take a quarter of an hour or more for Plug to tell you that, did it? Come across now. Tell Uncle Dan the whole of it.'

'Oh, we talked a little about football and — one or two things.'

'H'm. All right, if it's a secret. See the worms?'

Jack shook his head. 'No, Fishgill wasn't there. I mean, he went out. I say, what about a thundering good long hike?'

They hiked, and Jack was alternately quite lively and talkative and oddly detached and silent. Dan did a deal of speculating, but he asked no more confidences. When Jack got ready to tell him he would. In the evening Jack went to see his parents alone, overstaying study hour considerably. For the rest of the evening he was

quiet and, Dan suspected, depressed, although he displayed a kind of hectic jollity for a few minutes when Lester Wrenn dropped in.

The next day, Monday, Jack was elusive as an eel. Dan saw almost nothing of him save in classes. He showed up in the room after dinner long enough to convince his chum that, whatever had ailed him yesterday, to-day he was quite normal again. So, when at three, coming out of a French recitation, Greg Knight told Dan the astounding news, Dan was fairly thunderstruck. Jack had quit the team, announced Greg; cleared out his locker and turned in his togs!

Dan said: 'I know a good one, too; about an Irishman.' But Greg's face told him that he wasn't jesting, and Dan added: 'But he can't do it, Greg! Why, that's perfect rot! What's Gene say? Who told you about it?'

'Fred. He's all riled up. Seen Jack since dinner?'

'Sure, but he didn't say — I've got to find him! He was here in class a minute ago. What the dickens is eating him?'

But when he got to the room, Jack had been and left. His books on a corner of the table mutely testified to that. Dan sat down, took one foot in his hands, and gave himself to thought.

If it was really true that Jack had resigned from football, and Dan couldn't doubt the authenticity of Greg's story, there was, of course,

just one explanation. Something that had transpired yesterday afternoon in Plug Graves's room was at the bottom of it. Only, what had been said down there? Was it possible that Gene Hopkins, faced by the alternative of advancing Jack or incurring the School's displeasure, had persuaded Jack to resign? That didn't seem within the realm of reason. Dan had no great liking for the coach, but he couldn't imagine him doing a thing like that. Then, if it wasn't Gene who had schemed the business, it must have been Plug. But what pressure could Plug have brought to bear? And then, too, even Plug, with all his fat-headedness, wouldn't ——

Oh, well, there was one person capable of explaining the silly affair, and that was Jack himself, and Dan meant that he should explain. Meanwhile, he must get over to the field for practice. He expected to find Jack somewhere about when he reached the gridiron, but he didn't. What he did find was much excited discussion of his chum's strange action. He heard all sorts of solutions of it, none of which sounded plausible, and he heard many indignant, even angry, denunciations. Fred Way knew only what Gene had told him, and Gene, while soberly regretful over the loss of such a valuable player, appeared oddly philosophical. Dan, listening while the matter was talked over by Gene and a group of the fellows, suspected that he knew why the coach was so little

concerned. Whoever had persuaded Jack to take the step, the coach's position had been made much simpler. With Jack in the squad he would have had to find a place in the first line-up for him, to the disadvantage of Plug Graves, Jerry Dabney, or Greg Knight. With Jack out of the way, of his own volition, his problem had vanished.

'Here, Dan, he's in with you,' exclaimed Dutch Chaldron, pulling at Dan's arm. 'What about it? Why did he get out?'

Dan shook his head. 'Search me,' he answered. Then, loyalty to his chum demanding some sort of defense, and seeking about for an explanation, a theory popped into his mind which, for all he knew, might be the true one. 'I don't know anything about it for sure, Dutch, but I suspect that Jack's folks are at the bottom of it. Fact is ——' He hesitated. Jack had not asked secrecy, but he had let Dan understand that he would be as well pleased if the tidings of his father's presence in the town were not published. Here, though, announcement of the fact could be made to Jack's advantage. 'Fact is,' he went on, 'his father got here about a week ago, and he's not very keen, maybe, for our style of football. Of course, compared to English Rugby, it is a bit rough!'

'I believe that's it,' said Mr. Hopkins in a tone of relief. 'I couldn't get him to say what the trouble was, but it's quite likely his folks have put on the screws. Well, I'm sorry to lose him,

mighty sorry, but he probably knows his business better than we do, fellows. And, of course, it isn't as if we couldn't get along without him.'

'I'm sure you can, sir,' observed Dan, with the slightest possible emphasis on the 'you.' The coach shot him a glance that held no kindliness, but refused the challenge. He turned briskly to Hal Laidlaw.

'Well, we'll have to start going, Hal. First squad over to the dummy now, and let's see what you intend to do to Lawrence! Don't let any of them off with less than two clean tackles, Mr. Manager.'

Dan didn't encounter Jack until he got back to the room about half-past five. Jack was studying, but he looked up smilingly at the other's entrance. 'Hello,' he said heartily. 'How'd it go to-day?' He had been practicing that greeting, and he thought now that he had got it off rather well.

'All right,' answered Dan, dropping into the chair across the table and regarding Jack with a coldly speculating eye. 'About as per usual.'

Jack nodded, met his look for a moment, and then dropped his own gaze uneasily to his book. 'That's good,' he murmured.

'Think so, eh? Nice of you to be interested.' Dan's sarcasm was colossal. 'The fellows will be awfully bucked up when I tell 'em you inquired!'

Jack squirmed. 'Please, Dan!' he muttered.

'Of course it was just a bit embarrassing for

me.' Dan laughed jovially. 'Having fellows ask me about it, you know, and having to tell 'em I hadn't even heard it! Made me look rather an ass, you see. Dare say some of the silly coots wondered why you hadn't tipped me off!'

'I — I wanted to, Dan, honestly I did! But — but I was afraid you'd simply go off the deep end! Not that I'd have blamed you ——'

'What nonsense! Why, my dear fellow, do you think that I'd be upset by the mere announcement that you had decided to forego the pleasures of football? After all, you know, I threatened to chuck the whole business myself just the other day. I can easily understand that you don't want to be associated with a team that loses all its games. Quite natural. Of course, some chaps'll say that you quit under fire and things like that, but you needn't listen to 'em.'

'Will you be still?' flared Jack surprisingly. 'You don't need to try to make me feel any — any rottener than I do! Do you suppose I wanted — do you suppose I'd have quit if it hadn't been necessary?'

'Oh, it was necessary, was it?' asked Dan composedly. 'Necessary to whom? Gene Hopkins? Plug Graves?'

'To me,' answered Jack doggedly. 'I — I never mentioned it, but I want to get a scholarship, Dan. You understand, don't you? Dad's not going to make much money for a while, and —

you know how things are with us.' Dan nodded, and Jack, encouraged, went on more glibly: 'It hasn't been very easy lately. I'm not getting decent marks. Not what I should get, anyway. Mr. Crolle started to jump me the other day. You were there.'

'Well, I didn't think he exactly "jumped" you,' replied Dan judicially. 'But never mind. Go ahead.'

'And I've been fairly bad in Latin, too. Football takes up an awful lot of time, Dan, and you know it. You've said so yourself. And — and I do need that scholarship.'

'Sure. And two and two usually make four, the moon's not really made of green cheese, and you're lying like a house afire. Confound you, Jack, come clean!'

There was silence. Jack stared at his open book.

'You were lying, weren't you?' asked Dan gently.

Jack nodded. 'I'm sorry, Dan,' he muttered.

'That's all right. It was such a dumb sort of lie that it wouldn't fool any one and probably doesn't count against you. What's the real story? What happened down in Plug's room yesterday after dinner?'

After a moment Jack raised his head, looked across almost imploringly and answered: 'Dan, I can't tell you. I'm sorry, but I just can't. All I

can say is that I've got a good reason for doing what I've done. You'd say the same if — if you knew. Please let it go like that. Will you? I know fellows will hate me for quitting the team, but that can't be helped. I couldn't do anything else. Anyhow, Mr. Hopkins was awfully decent and said I was free to do what I thought best, and I fancy it won't make much difference to the team, because, after all, Dan, I wasn't a first-string fellow. If you'd rather not go on rooming with me, I'll get out. I shan't mind, Dan. I mean to say I'll do it gladly. Just you say the word.'

'Quite through?' asked the other calmly. Jack nodded. 'Then with your permission I'll say a few words myself. If you say you can't tell me about it, that's good enough for me. I'm not going to make-believe that I'm tickled to death with what's happened, for I'm not. I'm — I'm sort of sick about it. And there's no use pretending that you're not in for a rough time of it, because the fellows are going to feel pretty sore and think up a lot of mean things to say. I wish you'd tell me one thing, if you can, Jack. Have your folks anything to do with it?'

'My folks?' asked Jack startledly.

'Yes, have they asked you not to play?'

'Oh, no!' Jack looked relieved. 'They haven't even heard yet!'

'I didn't think that was it. I asked because I started a rumor at the field, on the spur of the

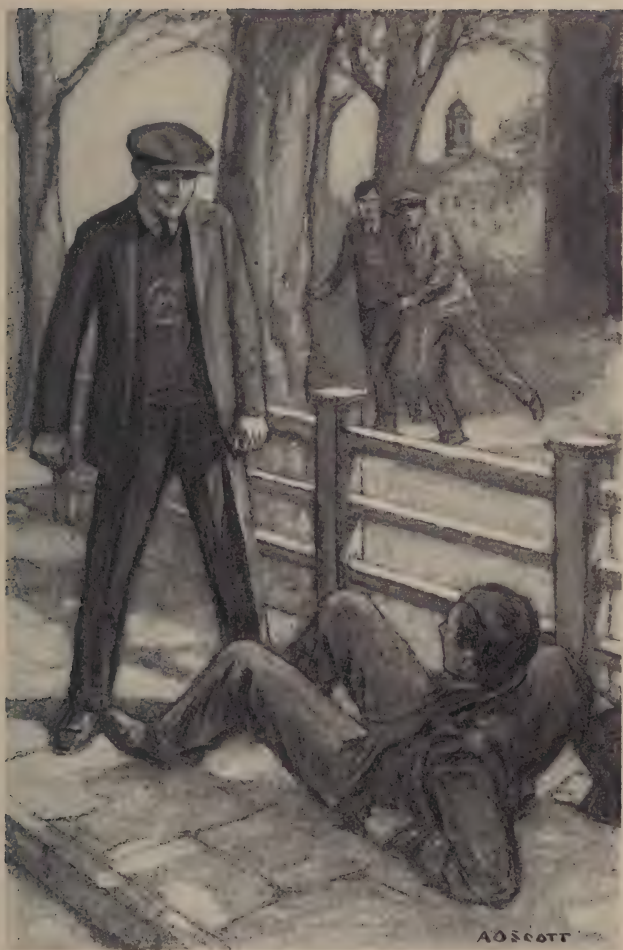
moment, to the effect that your father was down on your playing. I sort of half believed it at the time. Anyway, it went pretty well, and you'd better let it ride.' Jack shook his head, but Dan paid no heed and went on. 'You say you've got a good reason and I'll take your word for it. Only, if I were you, old son, I'd give it a lot of thought and see if I couldn't change my mind. That stuff about the team not needing you is the bunk. The team needs you like the dickens. And that means that the School needs you. So don't throw it over without thinking mighty hard about it. As for the rest of your blamed silly remarks, I'll treat 'em with the silent contempt they deserve, only announcing that if you shoot off your fool mouth any more about changing your room, I'll punch your head!'

Jack's astounding deflection created about as great a sensation as the history of the School afforded. The School felt doubly aggrieved. First, they were losing the services of a very good, some even said a great, player. Secondly, a hero had turned to clay. And perhaps nothing more effectually sours one's disposition than the discovery that one's hero is no more than human. Dan had predicted that Jack was in for a bad time, and the prediction was speedily fulfilled. Jack felt the weight of his fellows' displeasure as early as that Monday evening. He found some consolation in the fact that an explanation was not asked of him,

for he had none to offer; none, he felt, that would really explain. Quite a good number of the team — Dan, of course, and Greg and Lester and Ronny Landreth and Plug — Plug especially — and several others — allowed the matter to make no difference in their attitude; but Jack realized that under their friendliness was suspicion and disapproval. Now and then during the succeeding days a junior, trusting to his age to protect him from reprisal, called an insult, but for the most part he was left alone. He was not allowed to deceive himself as to the attitude of those who avoided him, however, for it isn't necessary to speak to exhibit your feelings. Occasionally, at first, fellows he had known on the squad invited his confidence, willing, it seemed, to accept him again provided his explanation satisfied them. But it never did. He had adopted a formula: 'I had to give up playing for private reasons.' It wasn't successful.

Dan returned to Number 37 in a rather disheveled condition on Thursday afternoon, but he was uncommunicative, and not until that evening did Jack learn what had happened. He got the story from Lester Wrenn, leaning against a radiator in the lower corridor and speaking in low tones.

'Greg and I were coming out of the gym,' narrated Lester unctuously, 'and saw Plug and Pen Stoulson walking together and Dan about a dozen



'GREG AND I BEAT IT OVER TO THE SCENE OF
BATTLE'

yards behind. We heard Dan call to Plug and then stroll over toward the tennis courts. Plug dropped Pen and followed. Greg and I both suspected that something was up and stood there on the steps and watched. When Plug got up to where Dan was waiting for him, Dan said something, we couldn't hear what, and then smashed him and Plug went down. Of course Greg and I beat it over to the scene of battle, and Stoulson came loping back, too. When we got near, Plug was getting up, looking awfully surprised; too surprised, I guess, to be mad for a minute. I heard him say, "What's that for?" and Dan answers: "I'm feeling peeved, Plug. It's about Jack Devitt dropping out. Come on and take some more." "What's that got to do with me?" asked Plug, getting angry. "What have I got to do with it?" "Not a thing," says Dan. "Not a thing, of course, Plug, but it's upset me and I'm kind of nasty tempered." And with that he jumps in and hands Plug an awful wallop under the ear, and Plug sits down again! Well, Plug gets a sort of suspicion then that Dan means business, and he gets up and they have it. It was some scrap while it lasted! Only, he added sorrowfully, 'it only went the one round. Some more of the crowd came out of the gym and we grabbed the belligerents. Plug was pretty well messed up; nose bleeding and a nasty lump under one eye. Dan got off with a sprained thumb. Worst of it is, though, Pup

Kruger came along just at the last, and so I suppose Faculty has it by now and there'll be the dickens to pay. Pup just glories in the old Greek and Roman set-tos; you can see his eyes shine when we come to a good scrap in his history class, but I'm afraid he's thumbs-down on the contemporary stuff. Gosh, I hope Faculty won't sock it too hard to Dan! Plug, either, for that matter. We need those lads!'

Jack stared back in silence, aghast and miserable.

CHAPTER XXI

AFTER THE GAME

'WHY did you fight Plug Graves?' demanded Jack sternly.

Dan smiled cheerfully. 'Why does a bird sing or a flower open to the sun?' he inquired poetically. 'It's Nature's law, Jack.'

'Please don't be any more of an ass than you have to,' begged the other. 'What was the idea?'

Dan shrugged. 'I merely yielded to an impulse. We all have our impulses.'

'But we don't all play the silly goat with them! Plug thinks now that I told you what' — Jack paused and floundered — 'about ——'

'He can't think anything of the sort,' rejoined Dan soothingly, 'because I definitely stated that I didn't hold him to blame. "You can't blame me," said he. "I don't," said I, and then he sat down.'

'Well, I wish you hadn't, Dan. One of the faculty saw you and there may be the dickens to pay.'

'Kruger? He didn't come along until it was all over. He can't testify that he saw me fighting, Jack.' (And evidently he didn't since nothing came of it.)

'Just the same it was a silly business,' insisted Jack.

'Was it? Well, it was awfully satisfying,' answered Dan grimly. 'As far as it got, that is. Look here, old son, I know perfectly well that Plug Graves did you dirt. That's all I do know, of course, because he made you promise not to tell, but that's quite enough for me. Any fellow ——'

'There wasn't any promise,' said Jack moodily. 'He knew I wouldn't be likely ——' He stopped, warned by the triumphant gleam in Dan's eyes. 'I haven't said Plug had anything to do with it!' he added hurriedly, but weakly.

'Don't quibble, son, don't quibble. Anyhow, I knew before. That's why I smashed Plug. I wanted to do it earlier, but I had to wait until he was done hobbling around with a cane. Any fellow who saves me from a beetling precipice is going to get a fair deal as long as I've got my health. Or, anyway, I'm going to do what I can to get him one. Now, since it's too late to go to the village, I'd advise you to open your books and put in a few licks. Don't forget the scholarship, old dear.'

'That's all right. I really meant that about the scholarship, Dan. And now that I don't have to bother with football ——'

'"Bother" is good,' said Dan dryly. 'I don't want to discourage you, Jack, but they have the

scholarships pretty well nailed down here. So don't be too disappointed if you don't manage to yank one loose.'

'I won't,' Jack promised. 'But I do need one, and I'm going to try mighty hard for it, and I've always had an idea that if you try hard enough for a thing ——'

'You get tired,' interrupted Dan cynically. 'However, I'd like to see you make it, feller. Hope you do. Look here, if you do get it, Jack, I'll turn a handspring in front of Academy and give you nine long cheers! There, that's something to work for!'

One morning in February Dan supplied the School with much amusement, thereby keeping his word.

It was surprising how soon Jack accustomed himself to the new order of things. He kept away from the football field save on Saturdays and divided the better part of the two hours formerly devoted to practice between studying in Number 37 and visiting his mother. Gradually the School forgot its grievance against him; forgot, anyway, to give him visible sign of it; and he was able to move about without self-consciousness. To be sure, he missed football; at first most awfully; but he comforted himself with the assurance that next year he would be back again. Having retired from a recognized form of athletic endeavor, he was obliged to join a class at the gymnasium,

something he was quite ready to do, since he realized that he should keep himself in condition. Dan spoke cheerfully of basket-ball and hockey to come, insisting that Jack could make either team he chose, but the latter knew little of those games and was doubtful.

There was no game to watch on the next Saturday, for the Blue-and-Russet went down the river to Springville and played Adams Academy. Dan departed in rather good spirits, hopeful that at last a victory for the team was in sight. Coach Hopkins had been less emphatic on the trick plays during the past week and had given some time to perfecting a defense against the Adams style of game, a style which went in for a variety of passes and much solid application of weight and brawn between tackles. Jack might have gone along with the rest of the School, but Saturday was a half-holiday at the factory, and instead he spent the afternoon with his father and mother. Captain Devitt was getting on very well at his work, was already in line for promotion to a more important position and a consequent raise in wages, and seemed so much better than either Mrs. Devitt or Jack could remember his being since the War that even the latter was almost convinced that his father's malady had at last succumbed to the healing influence of time.

Jack got news of the Adams game when he returned to School shortly before supper, first from

a hurrying Landreth and then from Dan. Mount Collier had once more been beaten! Oh, it hadn't been such a devastating affair, explained Dan with assumed cheerfulness. It might easily have ended in a tie or even in a win for the Blue-and-Russet. Only — well, it hadn't. The final count had been 7 to 6. Adams had kicked her goal after touch-down and Mount Collier hadn't. That was all there was to it. Very simple. And when did they eat, because Dan was hungry enough to munch a bale of hay!

Details came later, when a group of Upper House fellows were on their way to the movies and Jack tagged along with Dan and Gregory Knight. Greg, who had been delegated to add an extra point to his team's 6, and who had failed, was alternately derisive over his own performance and the conduct of the game as a whole. 'Maybe I'm not supposed to criticize, Jack, since I messed up that try-for-point,' he said, 'but I'll be eternally switched if Gene or any one else can blame me for the loss of that game. Three times — well, twice, anyhow, we had a chance to score and didn't. That's true, isn't it, Dan? Once we were squarely on their ten-yard line, by golly!'

'What happened?' asked Jack sympathetically.

Greg groaned. 'Oh, Pebble tried the old strategy stuff, of course. He didn't want to. He told me so coming back. But he had his orders, you see. Gene had it all doped out beforehand.

Inside their twenty yards it was to be the hand-deceiveth-the-eye. No use trying to break through their line. Oh, dear, no! Nothing so simple as that! Number Two Shift, of course, and the ball to Dab, and the interference sliding off right, and Dab easing off to the left and then circling. Swell stuff against a kindergarten, but no earthly use against a real team. Dab was spilled for a loss of a couple of yards, besides getting a nice crack on his head that made him woozy for the rest of the quarter. Then we tried an off-tackle thingumbob that never was any good; Plug lost his interference and overshot the hole and only got about a yard, I guess. I wanted to see Pop try a field goal then; it would have been a possibility, at least. (Gene had derricked me, of course, figuring that because I hadn't been able to put the ball over the stick that time, I was no more good.) But they wouldn't try a field goal, which might have given us the old game, but had to flatten a pass over center. At that, Slim almost got his hands on it. Didn't, though. That was our last hope, and we never got well past mid-field again.'

'But I thought Gene had given you some line plays, Greg,' said Jack.

'He had, but he got cold feet when we started with them and switched back to the old reliable "teasers," which never teased any one and never will.'

'What gets my goat,' said Dan perplexedly, 'is that it was one of those same "teasers" that got us in position for our only score.'

'It was?' exclaimed Greg doubtfully.

'Sure. Don't you remember? Gene's pet, with Plug carrying wide outside right end. We managed to box their left end nicely and Plug galloped about twenty yards. He could have gone the whole way if he hadn't tried to run down that safety-back instead of dodging him!'

'That's right, it was the famous Number Eight, wasn't it? My, I'll bet Gene got all swelled up like a poisoned frog! Well, we were still a fairish way off from a touchdown and it wasn't strategy that got it for us, either; it was good old-fashioned plugging. You see,' he explained to Jack, 'that was in the first quarter. Adams hadn't had a chance to find out then that our tricks were just bunk, and Gene hadn't told Bob to score by sleight-of-hand. So Bob went primitive, and between Plug and Dab and me, we got the old capsule over.'

'You did most of it,' reminded Dan. 'Even if,' he added, 'Plug did get the last play and the glory.'

'That's all right. As long as we scored. Plug played pretty well to-day, anyhow; better than he's done this season, I'd say.'

'We all played better,' said Dan gloomily, 'but it didn't get us anything. We aren't shining

heroes around this here School right now, Greg, so don't fool yourself. The crowd who went down there aren't bothering to figure what might have been or whether we played well or rotten. They're doing a simple sum in addition this evening, old-timer; adding up three beatings and a tie and making it four defeats. There'll be a howl pretty soon. You wait and see.'

There was. Had Dan and the rest remained outside the little theater ten minutes later, they'd have known about it. Some fifty to sixty disgruntled youths, after holding an impromptu indignation meeting in Lower House recreation room, marched en masse to Mrs. Thissel's and, standing across the street, addressed demands at the curtained windows of Coach Hopkins's sitting-room. '*We want to win!*' shouted the crowd in unison. '*We want a team!*' observed the malcontents as one man. '*We want a coach!*' shrieked a lone protestant. He was promptly squelched by his companions, and, being only a junior, remained squelched. While he had uttered a sentiment to which the others secretly subscribed, he was felt to have approached closely to lèse majesté!

Inside, the regular after-combat conference was in session, Coach Hopkins in the chair and a picked assemblage of players hanging on his words. The disturbance produced dismay. After an amazed and inquiring exchange of glances, the

meeting shuffled its feet and stared hard at the carpet. All, that is, save the coach. He smiled brightly, even radiantly, made a reassuring motion and left the room. They heard him emerge on the little porch, heard a louder chorus of shouting, and looked their relief.

Comparative quiet followed the welcoming outburst and the coach's voice arose confidently on the night air. 'Fellows, you've got the right idea. You want to win. So do I. So does the team. Now ——'

But what the coach said next was surprisingly howled down! Nor during the several minutes spent by him out there was he again able to make himself heard. The juniors and lower middlers — it was claimed afterwards that a handful of upperclassmen participated in the affair, but the report was diplomatically discredited — shouted, laughed, howled, whistled, and behaved, in fact, in a most discreditable manner! And Coach Hopkins closed the door gently at last, paused a moment in the darkened hallway to recover his poise, and reëntered the room laughing and shaking his head. 'Too many for me,' he said. 'A lot of youngsters, of course. Well, they'll get tired in a minute and go home. Now, taking up the matter of finesse again ——'

But the disgruntled ones didn't go home in a minute, nor for a number of minutes; not, in fact, until Mrs. Thissel, aroused from her nodding en-

joyment of the kitchen fire, stalked forth and routed them from their position.

Trouble resulted, for the matter reached the ears of the Faculty. However, when the list of malefactors reaches the number of fifty or more, punishment becomes difficult, and the investigation resulted in the end in nothing more drastic than a severe dressing-down by the Principal in Chapel on Wednesday morning.

By that time the School had partly forgiven the erring football team and were busy arranging mass-meetings in its interest. There was a meeting on Wednesday night and another on Friday, and fellows sang and shouted themselves hoarse and Coach Hopkins made an inspiring appeal for the Team — that was Friday evening — and told his hearers that they must Rally Round and give their Unequivocal Support, in which case there was never a doubt that Victory would perch on their Banner. I have unintentionally used capitals where they don't belong, but the coach's speeches had just that effect. He talked in capitals and made you think in capitals for an hour afterwards.

The scrub team got itself licked decisively every afternoon that week save Friday. On Friday it saved its skin by not playing the first eleven. The School sat in the grandstand and cheered lustily whenever a cheer-leader instructed them to. The Spirit of Victory hovered closer and closer. Those

who had faltered in their allegiance to Coach Hopkins metaphorically heaped ashes on their heads and did penance. It was felt that, in spite of what had gone before, the Blue-and-Russet was about to crown itself with glory by sending Lawrence down to defeat on Saturday after next. The team almost got to thinking so itself. In fact quite a few of them did think so. Only Dan and Greg and Lester and some half-dozen other pessimists refused to enthuse. And then came the despised Hilliard School and —

CHAPTER XXII

EXIT THE COACH

HILLIARD came, saw, conquered. Not that the score showed it, for at the end of sixty minutes of playing the figures were Mount Collier 13, Hilliard 0. But, nevertheless, to all intents and purposes the visitor had won a rather notable victory. Hilliard was a small school — sixty students was about her enrollment — and it was said that her football squad never numbered more than twenty-four. She was coached by one of the masters during the interims between his manifold scholastic duties, and she lacked numerous advantages and conveniences possessed by her opponents. Hilliard had faced Mount Collier on the Saturday before the Lawrence game for many years, being selected for that position on the schedule because of the certainty that she would not provide too severe a test, and it was customary for the Blue-and-Russet to pile up fairly stupendous scores against her; once a game had ended with Mount Collier on the extremely long end of a 52 to 0 total. Last year the home eleven had won by 33 to 3; and last year's eleven had been nothing to boast of. This season, credited with a team under rather than above the average — it had lost all but one of its games — Hilliard

held the Blue-and-Russet to two touchdowns, from one of which Greg Knight had kicked a goal. No, not even Mount Collier's most optimistic supporter could call it other than a Hilliard victory.

Jack took his mother and father, neither of whom could understand his dejection as the contest proceeded. The Captain voted it ripping, and Mrs. Devitt, although not so enthusiastic — she would have preferred a less strenuous spectacle — declared that she had enjoyed it very much. Jack's gloomy verdict was that it was awful! Just what was wrong with the home team would be hard to say. It would be far simpler to tell what was right with it. It showed flashes of good football, but the flashes usually occurred when the ball was in mid-field. The two touchdowns were as nearly one-man performances as touchdowns ever can be. Once Bob Weeks got off on a quarterback sneak and eluded the enemy horde while scampering fifty-two yards to the goal line. Again, Myers, substituting for Lester Wrenn, picked up a wandering pigskin and went seventeen for a score. On the first occasion, Greg followed up with a drop-kick bringing a seventh point. On the last Pop Somers's attempt went under the bar instead of over it.

While Hilliard never got very close to a score, she nevertheless made her opponent look foolish over long periods. She had a strangely varied team, with more weight in her back-field than in

her line, and a center trio of comparative dwarfs. But she had far more speed than Mount Collier, who looked positively sluggish in comparison, played smartly, and had a small but useful assortment of plays. Perhaps if she had possessed a punter of even fair ability the outcome would have been still more to her credit. Coach Hopkins had, of course, intended to give employment to every man in the squad, but when he found that even the first-string players were powerless to make much headway against the adversary, he revised his plan. To be sure, when the last quarter was well along, he did empty about half his bench into the field, but as a contest to provide experience to the substitutes the Hilliard game was not a great success. A wiser coach would have used his men as was most advisable in preparation for the big game, but Gene Hopkins was anxious to make a present showing, realizing, perhaps, that public opinion at Mount Collier was more than ready to swing against him. That he was extremely anxious to pile up a sizable score against Hilliard was evidenced by his complete abandonment of his trick plays in the second half and his dependence on line-smashing tactics. Unfortunately, though, too little attention had been devoted to the latter, and the plays used were so simple and ancient that it would have taken a team far better perfected in them to make them go successfully. By punting farther and

more skillfully than Hilliard and by employing a forward pass from Brooks or Somers to Slim Storey, she was able to keep the ball in the enemy territory most of the time, but steady progress through the opposing line was beyond her.

Hilliard went home plainly elated, as she had reason to be, and Mount Collier filed glumly back to the gymnasium, fully aware of the fact that she had been out-pointed in a match that she should have won overwhelmingly. The School as a whole, however, accepted the result of the contest with surprising indifference. After all, the big chance now was the Lawrence game, and Coach Hopkins had virtually promised them that. One more disaster in a season of disasters meant little so long as at the end a glorious victory awaited. Optimism, lacking in mid-season, was now inconsistently in command. Perhaps so many cheers had been cheered and so many songs had been sung that Mount Collier was drugged with enthusiasm. Of course, there were doubters and grumblers to be found, but as a general thing the Hilliard game was waved aside as a happening regrettable but of slight moment.

Fortunately, in view of the closeness of the Lawrence game, there were no casualties. Once Plug Graves, who had played a hard game, although to little consequence, was laid up for repairs after a tackle, but he had returned to the fracas later and was reported undamaged. There

were a few honest scars to be seen on various countenances — Greg had the skin pretty well off one side of his nose; but so far as the physical condition of the players was concerned, there was nothing to worry about.

As always just before the final contest tales and rumors flew thickly about the School on Sunday and the succeeding days. Gene was going to revamp his line. Gene was going to start the big game with the same line-up as in the last. Gene had a new play under cover that was a whiz; the team had learned it, but it hadn't been shown. Gene was going to scrap his fancy didos and just wear Lawrence out with the good old dependable game that Granddad knew. Jack Devitt was coming back. Dabney was to be tried at quarterback. Lawrence, beaten by Somerset on Saturday, 17 to 13, was in a slump, with half her team in the hospital. Lawrence fellows were predicting four scores against Mount Collier and wagering that the latter wouldn't win a point. It all added to the excitement. You could have a new rumor for breakfast, dinner, and supper; and then take a fourth to bed with you. Cheer meetings became almost nightly events and impromptu processions paraded the campus on the least provocation, or without any at all. On Wednesday evening, Coach Hopkins made his last address before a large and enthusiastic audience and was never better in his life. He radiated confidence and

every one — or nearly every one — got up on his hind legs and cheered wildly when he had finished. The Musical Club, sixteen strong, performed abandonedly, and Chris Cowper, at the piano, nearly tore that tortured instrument apart. In short, everything was extremely lovely and the goose hung high.

And then, somewhere around noon on Thursday, a bolt from the blue — a bolt that ran along a telegraph wire — brought sudden and appalling consternation.

Coach Hopkins had had a message from his home in Ohio. His father was dying and he must go at once. On Saturday Mount Collier would face Lawrence without a coach!

In the main the news that traveled swiftly about the School was correct. However, that the coach's father was dying was well beyond the facts. He was seriously ill with pneumonia, but the telegram did not hint at fatal results, nor did fatal results ensue. But the main fact — that the coach was obliged to desert the team in its hour of need and return to Ohio — was sufficient to plunge the School in black despair. Not by any extremely remote possibility could he get back in time to take charge for the Lawrence contest.

A hurry call was sent out to the members of the team and they flocked to Mrs. Thissel's to find the coach with his bag closed and all preparations

for his flight completed. Ensued a somewhat breathless and excited conference. Speaking, it is to be feared, not quite convincingly, the coach declared that, while his absence didn't coincide with his wishes, it was, nevertheless, of small consequence. After all, the team had reached its peak, further preparation was, in any case, valueless, and he was quite sure that, with what he had taught them and with their own fine ability and determination to win, his absence from the field on Saturday would in no way affect the result. They were to remember his instructions, be guided by what they had learned. Of course Captain Way would take his place, acting both as captain and coach. He suggested that an advisory committee be formed that evening with whom the captain could consult. He suggested, as its five members, Captain Way, Graves, Weeks, Stoulson, and Manager Laidlaw. Fortunately, he ended, picking up his bag and edging toward the door and the waiting cab, the plans formulated for the conduct of the important game were well known to those members. They had his sincere wishes for a notable triumph which he firmly believed to be inevitable. At the last he gave Plug Graves an address to which the result of the game was to be wired him at the earliest possible moment. Then he was given a hearty if rather confused cheer as he rattled away, and the members of the Mount Collier Football Team ob-

served each other in a somewhat dazed manner as they plodded back to School.

Practice was held as usual, save that the work was confined to squad drills. Usually the third-string players lined up against the scrub for a ten or fifteen minute scrimmage, but to-day that ancient custom was abandoned, and the spectators, still confused, even incredulous, over what had happened, wandered back to the dormitories feeling more than ever that the world had crashed about their ears. The scrub disbanded without the usual formalities and, with twilight still below the horizon, the field was deserted.

At seven o'clock there was a meeting in the gymnasium, called, it was understood, to perfect the organization of the advisory committee. To the surprise of many, it was discovered that Mr. Sawyer, Chairman of the Faculty Committee on Athletics, was to preside. Captain Way, who had undergone more than an hour of Dan's and Greg's and Landreth's eloquence, addressed the chair briefly. He paid tribute to Coach Hopkins and then astoundingly announced, in effect, that from now on there would be a considerable change in plans, and he called on Dan Clinton to acquaint them further.

Dan said: 'Fellows, I take it that you all want to beat Lawrence on Saturday. All right. Then I'm going to speak plainly. We can't do it with what we've got. The plays we've been taught, all

but about five, are no earthly use to us against Lawrence. I'm not going to argue the point with you, Plug. I say it's so and most of us know it's so.' Plug subsided, astonished and alarmed. 'There's one more day between now and Saturday. To-morrow we're going to have two practice sessions. It's been arranged very kindly by Mr. Sawyer that all players may take cuts. We're going to work out some scoring plays and try our best to learn them. Any fellow who doesn't want to pitch in and work whole-heartedly to pull this team out of the ditch, and get it running again, can quit now or any time he likes. Now I move that we appoint a committee, as suggested by Mr. Hopkins.' He turned expectantly to Greg. Greg was on his feet, but there was such a chorus of protest from Plug and some of the others that it was a moment before the recognition granted him by Mr. Sawyer did him any good.

'I move that the committee consist of three instead of five,' he said, and sat down. Fred Way seconded the motion. It was declared carried after a 'yea' and 'nay' vote. To the concern and disgruntlement of the opposite camp, the appointees were Captain Way, Dan Clinton, and Bob Weeks. After that Plug made a speech, a rather angry one, was cautioned twice by the chair, and eventually subsided, muttering and glowering. Pen Stoulson arose and spoke diplo-

matically. There was no reason that he could see why they couldn't all work together and win the game. For his part he had frequently feared that Coach Hopkins was giving too much importance to strategy and not enough to force. Anyhow, since the management of affairs was no longer in the coach's hands, he was for tying up to the new authority and doing his best to put over a victory. There was applause and some groans, but it was plain that a majority of the meeting was with him. Some one, prompted by Dan, moved adjournment, and one of the most surprising meetings in the School's history came to an end after just twenty-four minutes.

Dan, Greg, Lester, Storey, Landreth, and Fred Way conferred in the latter's room until shortly before ten, by which time they had selected four plays to be introduced on the morrow. When, tired but triumphant, Dan finally got back to Number 37, he found Jack already in bed. Jack had heard a wild and garbled story of the extraordinary doings in the gymnasium that evening and was consumed with curiosity, but his curiosity had to wait, for Dan got in the first word as the door closed behind him.

'Report to Fred to-morrow, Jack,' he said crisply. 'Get a locker and find your togs. You're back on the team.'

Jack stared in amazement. 'But — but I can't, Dan! I mean to say ——'

'Say nothing, feller. Do as you're told. Fred's the big noise now and he wants you.'

'But, Graves ——'

'Plug's out and you're in. Oh, Plug will be used, I guess, but you'll start at right half. Practice at nine-forty and three-thirty. And a floor drill in the gym at half-past seven.'

'Oh, gee, Dan, I'd like to, but, honestly, I gave my word ——'

'Hold on! Did you give your word or did you just agree to get off the team on condition that Plug kept his mouth shut?'

'Then you knew?' faltered Jack.

'I don't know anything. I'm just guessing. Am I right?'

Jack nodded. 'Yes, I said I'd quit if he — if he'd keep something to himself.'

'Then, if you change your mind and join up again, he's at liberty to spill the beans?'

'Yes, and I guess he would, Dan. I don't believe I'd better ——'

'Shut up, idiot! Plug won't spill anything. He and I have a heart-to-heart talk coming in the morning, and when I get through with him he won't remember a thing that happened before to-day! Now go to sleep and get fit for a hard forty-eight hours, old son.'

'Go to sleep!' protested Jack. 'Gosh, I never want to sleep! What's happened, Dan? You've got to tell me. If you don't I'll — I'll keep you awake all night!'

'See can you do it,' said Dan grimly.

But he sat on Jack's bed and brought history down to date.

CHAPTER XXIII

WHAT PLUG GRAVES KNEW

It was nearly half an hour later when, his curiosity appeased, Jack said: 'I guess it won't matter now if I tell you about Plug and me, Dan. He didn't ask me not to; he was so sure I wouldn't want to, I suppose. But I did feel that, as long as he kept his part of the bargain, I ought to keep mum. Do you mind hearing it, Dan?'

'Not a bit,' replied the other, disguising his curiosity wonderfully. 'But you don't need to tell me a word unless you'd distinctly rather, old man.'

'I would. I've wanted to tell you, but — oh, well, there didn't seem any reason until Plug remembered, and after that I thought I oughtn't to.'

'Till Plug remembered what?'

'About me — and Dad. I guess I'd better start at the beginning. Do you remember the first night I met Plug? Over in 38, it was. He said he was sure he'd seen me before, but he couldn't remember where. He said he was at Salmon Lake last summer, and I nearly passed out, and then he went right ahead and said that it wasn't there. You see, it was there, but not last

summer; the summer before! It happened like this:

‘Dad had given up a situation in New York in May and hadn’t found another. One day he saw an advertisement for waiters and cooks and such for summer hotels, and it gave him an idea. He went to an employment place where they supply help to hotels and found that the hotel at Salmon Lake wanted what they called a “carriage clerk.” Dad got the position and went up there about the Fourth of July. He wrote back that everything was fine; the place and the house and his job. He liked the job awfully well because it kept him outside quite a bit. The hotel had a lot of automobiles and coaches, and folks went for long drives and excursions, and it was Dad’s job to book them and see that they got off and that every one was pleased. It kept him pretty busy, because there was quite a lot of work connected with it, but he was outdoors a lot and he liked it, and mother and I were hoping that it would help him to — to get back, you know.

‘One afternoon in early August a telegram came to mother in East Ogden. Dad had been taken ill and she was wanted right away. Of course we knew what had happened. There was no use in mother’s going, so I went. We both knew that by the time any one got to him Dad would be over the worst of it, and, if he didn’t take it into his head to light out, would be all

right. So I took a train that night and got to Salmon Lake the next morning. Dad was looking pretty bad, but he was quiet and only wanted to be taken away. They had had a doctor for him and given him mighty good care. We stayed there another day and then came home together. That day I heard what had happened.

‘Dad was pretty popular amongst the guests of the hotel. He can be awfully obliging and awfully jolly, and the womenfolks always take to him like anything. Well, they were having a tennis tournament, quite an important one with players from all over, and one afternoon they ran shy of umpires and asked Dad to take a match. So he did; he knows tennis well and plays it, too; and he sat on one of the high chairs from the billiard room which was on top of a table. They didn’t have any of those tower things; not on that court, anyhow. The court was in front of the hotel and about half the length of our corridor away. Well, right in the middle of the match there was a sudden terrific noise, and without any other warning a big airplane came shooting over the top of the hotel, flying low. It scared half the folks to death, so you can imagine what it did to poor Dad. I suppose he thought the whole German Air Force was coming! He just gave a yell, toppled off the table, and — oh, well, you can imagine, Dan!

— ‘They got a doctor for him quickly and put him

to bed, and the doctor, who didn't know a thing about Dad, said that he had some silly sort of insanity and the story got all over the place. Of course I told what really had happened, but you can't down a story that's once got a start on you, Dan. The next day Dad got up and we went down and got into a bus that took us to the station. There weren't very many folks about, for it was breakfast-time, but there were half a dozen or so on the front porch, and one of them was Plug Graves. Of course I didn't know who he was, but I'd seen him around the hotel, and, since he was about my age, I noticed him.

'I never expected to see him again, though. I'd forgotten all about him until he came into Greg's room that night. I remembered him then at once, and I was so afraid he'd remember me that I couldn't sit still. But he didn't. The worst of it was, though, that I knew he was trying to remember and that some time he would. Now and then he'd say so. You heard him. It didn't matter so much until Dad arrived, but after that I just couldn't stand the idea of Plug giving it out that Dad was crazy. I'd have done anything to prevent that, and so when he saw Dad and me together in church one day and remembered, and then asked me to see him and told me, why, I was ready to do what he liked. He said I was a good back, but he was a better, and there wasn't room for both of us on the team this year. If I'd

quit and not say he'd asked me to, he'd keep his mouth shut about Dad. I told him the truth, and I really think he believed it, Dan, but he shrugged his shoulders and pretended not to. So I just said I would. There wasn't anything else to do, was there?'

'N-no,' drawled Dan, 'not unless you'd brained him with a chair, the blamed rat! Well, I'm glad you told me, Jack. I suspected something of that kind, but I couldn't make sense of it. Forget it now, though. Plug won't bother you from now on, believe me! Plug,' he added grimly, 'is going to act awfully pretty!'

If, before, it had been Plug Graves who acted as the power behind the throne of Captain Way, on Friday it was Dan who fairly seized the scepter. But this was with Fred's entire consent. He was no executive, and he knew it. Dan was desperately busy from his moment of early rising until he tumbled tiredly into bed. The advisory committee held one hurried meeting after breakfast, but after that its three members acted on their own initiative; there wasn't time to get together in solemn conclave. Teaching new plays, even if they are of the simplest kind, is no easy matter. At the forenoon session the whole scheme looked hopeless, and almost every one save Dan was discouraged. Confusion reigned, and even discord occasionally raised its head. Yet by afternoon things looked better, and a pessimistic

audience took heart. The back-field ran through the whole programme of plays with good precision and fair speed. Those who had held their hands aloft in horror at the idea of working the team hard on the day before the game still shook their heads dismally, but were secretly less convinced that the heavens would fall.

Jack took the back-field with Weeks, Dabney, and Greg Knight. Plug, still amazed but perceptibly more philosophical, worked with the second squad. Perhaps he still believed that his relegation to the substitute list was only a gesture, and that on the morrow he would find himself back where, in his firm opinion, he belonged. Jack did his best, happy to be once again in the game and chock-full of enthusiasm and loyalty, but his idleness, in spite of gymnasium work, had left him stiff and, for him, a trifle slow. Toward the end of the afternoon session, which stretched itself out until it was almost too dark to see the ball ten feet away, he was going far better. But he was unbelievably tired when he lagged back to the showers through the twilight. Weariness, however, appeared to be the lot of all, and there was some grumbling among those who were still unreconciled to the new order. Timmy, and Pete, his assistant, worked late in the rubbing-room. The trainer was frankly satisfied with a fate which had removed Coach Hopkins, and he made no bones of saying so. 'We may get licked,'

he declared, 'but, by gorry, it'll be for something and not nothing at all!'

In spite of Dan's many duties during that remarkable day, it was made evident to Jack that he had found time to have that talk with Plug Graves. Jack and Plug had had no real meeting on the field, for Jack had avoided him carefully. But coming out of the shower after the last practice Jack ran squarely into him in the small passage that led to the locker room. He strove to pass with a casual nod, avoiding his glance, but Plug barred the way.

'Hello, Jack,' he exclaimed. 'Back to the mines, eh?'

'Why, yes,' answered the other uncomfortably. To his surprise — really, he'd never understand the fellow! — Plug was grinning. If he held resentment for anything that had happened, or remorse either, for that matter, it didn't show on his countenance.

'Good work!' cried Plug. 'In at the death, eh?' Then he sank his voice as a couple of fellows squeezed past. "'Course you understand that was all a joke, eh? What I said that day up in the room, I mean.'

Jack hesitated, and then, gravely, 'Oh, of course,' he assented. 'Just a joke.'

'Sure!' exclaimed Plug jovially. He slapped him soundly on a bare shoulder. 'That's the boy! Good luck, Jack!'

Later, Jack narrated the incident to Dan, confessing perplexity. Dan shrugged. 'Oh, that's like Plug. It's just his colossal vanity. What he does must be all right. If it's all right, no one can make a kick. In another chap it would be a case of saving his face, but Plug's face is never in danger. He's a low hound in some ways, but he's a bit engaging in spite of it!'

There were just twenty-nine in the gymnasium that evening; twenty-seven players, Manager Laidlaw, and Trainer McRaig. It was a rather strained-looking lot, but Jack, for one, thought he detected a new spirit in the team. Dan, a trifle blunderingly at first, and then, forgetting everything but his overwhelming ambition to attain a victory on the morrow, with confidence and precision and clarity placed the newer plays on the board and went over them step by step, almost inch by inch. Questions were fired and answered. Interest drove the tired expressions from the faces about him. Disputes arose, flourished, and were settled. The board was pushed aside and the rubber-shod feet walked and then trotted about the floor. Distantly sounded the cheering and songs from the final mass-meeting. Jack's eyes ached and his sight blurred; the white lamps in the high ceiling wavered and the shadows on the floor danced grotesquely. But finally it was over. There was no ceremony. Very wearily the little throng dissolved and made their

way from the gymnasium, their captain's last words beating on fagged brains, 'Hit the hay, fellows! Every one in bed by ten!'

Dan and Jack and Lester returned to the dormitory together, but only four words were uttered between the gymnasium and Upper House. Lester spoke those. 'Gee, but I'm tired!' he murmured.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE CAPTAIN CHEERS

THE Mount Collier-Lawrence game was half over. The teams had trailed from the field and a thousand or so of spectators were easing cramped limbs. The sun, which had shone fitfully during the first two periods of the contest, was hidden under a bank of light clouds in the west, but there was little wind and no discomfort for those who, trusting the promise of the forenoon, had left heavy wraps at home. The score-board at the summit of the grandstand presented four zeros, two for each contestant and two for each quarter.

That first half had been, on the whole, exciting out of all proportion to its result. There had been, following the kick-off, a period of desultory playing during which both teams, as if by previous agreement, had offered the ball to each other as soon as it had come into their possession. Jack and Greg had punted time after time and a long-limbed Lawrence back had returned the ball. The teams had chased back and forth between the two thirty-yard marks, watching each other carefully, awaiting a break or a portent. Then, recovering near her forty after a short kick by the Blue-and-Russet, Lawrence had made her first attempt at rushing. It had lacked power and

a forward pass had grounded. She had kicked again, and then, after a thrilling run-back by Lester, Mount Collier had tried two thrusts at the crimson line with scant success. Again the ball went skyward. As the period ended, Lawrence was back on her twenty-six, but in possession.

She started her first big drive when the second quarter began, and for a time it looked as though her well-heralded superiority was to win a score. But, although first down after first down came her way and she set the ball at last on the home team's twenty-six yards, the onslaught weakened, until, with two to go for another first and one down remaining, she was forced to try a forward pass from Mount Collier's eighteen. Storey knocked the ball out of the air and the Blue-and-Russet punted, Jack's long spiral dropping into the Lawrence quarter-back's arms well beyond mid-field. Lawrence tried the ends then, sending backs inside and outside the wing-men, now and then plunging off tackles. Once she got a man free and netted twenty-five or -six yards. Bob Weeks brought him down at last and they rolled across the side-line together close to the Mount Collier sixteen. It was then, and not until then, that the Blue-and-Russet convinced her supporters that she was a real team after all, for she held the enemy between the sixteen and the ten for three downs, and then, plunging desper-

ately through the formidable Lawrence bulwarks, blocked a placement kick. That appeared to give her confidence, for five minutes later she was well on her way to the Lawrence inner defenses. It was the whistle which brought that incursion to an end, leaving the home team supporters cheerfully hopeful of what the last half would bring forth.

An impartial critic would have said that for finished performance the visiting aggregation was immensely superior to the Blue-and-Russet, but he would have had to add that for fighting spirit the scales hung the other way. If yesterday's fatiguing labors had proved detrimental to Captain Way's team, there was nothing to show it. They were palpably less well organized, less coherent. Hesitation was frequently apparent, and at least twice signals had been misunderstood with a resultant loss of advantage. Yet the Blue-and-Russet somehow impressed as a great team; perhaps a great team which had not found herself and, perchance, never would, but a great team still. So far as size and weight were concerned, there could have been little difference between the contenders. It is possible that Lawrence had a trifle the better of weight in her back-field, but the lines were about on a par. It was easy enough, now that the two scoreless periods were over, to point to where Mount Collier or Lawrence might have, by different tactics or by sterner offense,

made a touchdown, yet these were school teams and not college elevens, and one of them was playing without the services of a coach. On the whole, the first half of the game had gone none so badly from the point-of-view of the football scientist.

Captain and Mrs. Devitt, seated in the very front row of the stand, had watched Jack's playing with admiring if not always comprehending eyes. The Captain, quite impressive in new attire and distinguished in bearing, had occasionally risen to a mild pitch of enthusiasm. When he had he had cried, 'Bravo!' in a politely restrained voice and met the amused but entirely respectful eyes of the fellows around him with a pleased smile. Really, it would certainly never have occurred to any of those who sympathetically observed his pleasure in the triumphs of his boy or the Mount Collier team to suspect him of aught save the most robust health of mind and body. Nor, so far as the present and future were concerned, would their appraisal have been at fault.

The stands sprang to their feet and the cheering began again as the teams trotted back. Quickly the contest started once more. Lawrence's kick-off went to Dabney, and he was dropped in his tracks. As the Blue-and-Russet lined up, it was observed that Captain Way, or, perhaps, the advisory committee, had failed to

make a single change in the team. They were all back, from Slim Storey, at left end, to Lester Wrenn, at right, and from Weeks at quarter to Greg Knight at full. Mount Collier meant to hold the ball now until she was forced to yield it, and hold it she did. Gone were Coach Hopkins's strategic 'teasers.' The Blue-and-Russet slammed at the Lawrence line from tackle to tackle, gained a little here, lost a little there, yet somehow managed to keep the pigskin. Occasionally Weeks skirted the line and slipped outside tackle; once for a good eight yards. Twice Jack crashed through guard-tackle for short but useful gains. Mount Collier kept going.

Lawrence, well advised throughout the season of what was going on at Westdale, expecting and having prepared for a number of time-consuming trick plays, was caught unawares. Her defense was unprepared for such sudden, fierce, repeated slams at the line. Gradually she realized that the style of attack expected was not coming, and by degrees met, with fair success, the problem of repulsing force instead of stealth. On her twenty-two yards she stemmed the advance. Greg's forward heave after a fake kick was missed by Storey and the excited Mount Collier adherents settled back into their seats, disappointed for the moment, but still hopeful.

The rest of the third quarter passed into history and left the score-board as yet unsullied. As the

fourth began, Mount Collier made her first change in the line-up. Nott replaced Chaldron and Benson took Stoulson's job at center. Lawrence had already, as early as the second quarter, made changes, and she now made others. Two first-string players returned and a new and powerful-looking right guard appeared in her ranks.

Three minutes of the last period passed while Lawrence tried her hand at forward-passing and reached her own forty without paying a penalty for her hazardous feats. There a back fumbled and recovered, and her advance was momentarily halted. When, forced at last to punt, she again lined up, she was on the opponent's thirty-six but she had lost the ball. Once again the Blue-and-Russet started an invasion, Greg smashing through twice for four yards, Jack snaking past tackle for three, Greg denting the center, and, by way of variety, Bob Weeks instituting a sneak that, with another two yards provided by Jack, brought a second first down and took the team well over the center line.

Weeks showed no mercy on his backs. Time after time they took the ball, doubled themselves over it and crashed into the enemy. The gains grew shorter as the goal was neared, and once the chain was dragged out and the distance measured. A penalty for off-side set the offense back, and at last Jack had to punt again. In such manner a

second march petered out almost on the threshold of success. Lawrence showed the effects of the game now. Fresh players were sifted in, and she started a series of bewildering side-passes that for a while had Mount Collier at her mercy. Yet they were finally fathomed and smeared. By that time, though, the Crimson was well into the Mount Collier territory.

The end of the game was fast approaching and a scoreless tie was predicted freely on the stand. Lawrence reached the thirty yards on a short pass and tried again. This time Dabney grabbed it out of the air and plunged straight ahead with it for six yards. Mount Collier's cheers became loud and assured once more.

Bob Weeks hoarsely demanded a miracle and Jack delivered it.

It was a straight plunge from position, the ball relayed to him by Weeks. Jack dashed at the hole, or where he hoped to find it, was through astonishingly and was off. How he slipped past the secondary defense he never knew, but Dan says he saw him dodge twice like a startled rabbit. Somehow Jerry Dabney, swinging in around the other end, came up with him and it was Jerry who sent the nearest pursuer toppling. The safety-man was coming in cautiously and Jack shifted the ball to his left arm. What happened was ridiculously simple, after all. Jack went up in the air, twisting sidewise, pushing down with his free

hand, spun once, stumbled, recovered, and, painfully conscious, as one may be in a dream, of a wrenched ankle, went on toward the nearing goal line.

Behind him the field, friend and foe, strung out, all but a very few hopelessly out of the race. Fortunately Lester Wrenn dogged the runner's flying feet over those last twenty yards and, just at the end, threw his tired body in front of a grim-faced enemy. Lester and the foe went down together and Jack, telling himself pantingly that he could go no farther, subsided barely across the line, some seventy yards from where he had started.

The game ended when Pop Somers, introduced for Greg, placed the ball neatly over the bar. Lawrence scarcely tried to prevent it, for the remarkable crimson team was virtually played to a standstill. It had enough strength to cheer, rather grudgingly it seemed, for the victorious foe, however, and Mount Collier cheered in return. And then, somewhat as an oncoming wave engulfs a fort of sand, the stands emptied themselves onto the field, the dust arose from under trampling feet and was dyed with amber by a momentarily relenting sun and a triumphant team was borne off on the shoulders of shouting admirers.

Jack's last glimpses through the golden haze remained in his memory for some time. One was

of Plug Graves, his face proudly agrin, shaking hands wildly with Hal Laidlaw. Another was of his father. The Captain, hat off, was cheering, and, although Jack couldn't hear his voice above the sounds about him, he knew beyond a doubt that the words he was uttering were not 'Bravo! Bravo!' but '*Rah! Rah! Rah!*'

THE END

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